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THE IDEA OF POETIC INSPIRATION IN THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
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BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Belief in poetic inspiration is a substitute for a naturalistic explanation of poetical ability. Of poetry man has always asked the question "Whence cometh it?" and because no one ever surely knew the answer the wonder of poetry grew. In different times and countries there has been a feeling that a poet is by some subtle charm distinguished from the rest of mankind and that the ability to make poetry is not an ability to be cultivated by any ordinary means of study and toil, but is a gift divinely bestowed.

Considering the great frequency of references to poetic inspiration by writers of all times it is surprising to find how few are the consistent treatments of the subject. The subject of poetic inspiration has been touched upon in many modern books on poetry. We find suggestive allusions to it in John Churton Collins' Poetry and Criticism, in George Santayana's Poetry and Religion and in William Allan Neilson's Essentials of Poetry. George Edward Woodberry is the only author to be cited, however, as having treated the subject of and for itself. His book The Inspiration of Poetry is a very suggestive inquiry into the nature of poetic power. His first chapter Poetic Madness and his last Inspiration present a general and illuminat-

ing discussion of the qualities of poetic inspiration. The other chapters of the book are occupied with specific studies of various authors who exemplify these qualities.

Of the idea of poetic inspiration in the eighteenth century no particular study has been made. Though general treatments of the subject of poetic inspiration are interesting and suggestive, it is source material that is of greatest value in the study of any one period.

Before we present the source material illustrating the appearance of the idea of poetic inspiration in the eighteenth century some preliminary description of the subject of inspiration is desirable. Combining as best we may the allusions and discussions by various authors of different times we may evolve an account that explains somewhat the attitude of belief in poetic inspiration.

The belief seems to have originated in the fact that the people wondered at the poet because he could not tell them why he wrote his poetry, nor how he did it. Because they had not poetry in themselves they considered it to be always an external thing, something to be found, something to be listened to. The poet was he who found or who heard, and only through him could poetry come to those who could not find or could not hear. But even as great as the wonder of the people at the gift of the poet was the poet's wonder at his own gift. For he could not always find the power he sought. "They are seldom good poets who can be poets when they will."¹ Sometimes the words would not come for all his striving, and sometimes they

1. Casaubon. Treatise on Enthusiasm.

came rushing upon him when he had made no effort. He did not know when he might gain what was worthy. So that even he who had the poetry in his heart believed there was some power which brought it to him. Poet and people alike, then, believed that the power was not within the poet, but came to him from without. They believed he should only abandon himself to the power that came, a power incomprehensible but mighty, and that his poetry should be made in spontaneity and unconsciousness. Because they could not understand the source of poetry they attributed it to divinity, in whom all might rest that was incomprehensible. The state in which the poet lost himself in creation they called enthusiasm, which word in its original form meant to be possessed of a god. From the tendency to regard the power of the poet as an external force came the idea of poetic inspiration. This external force was called the "afflatus" from the word afflare meaning "to blow out, or upon." The one who should be poet "breathed in" the power and from the word inspirare, "to breathe in" came the word inspiration, which denoted the attaining of that power which made the poet superior to other people and wholly different from them. He was not like other people, and he was not even consistently like himself. All his nature, his power, belonged to the inspiration he derived in a state of enthusiasm.

An account such as this gives no indication of the various forms which the belief in poetic inspiration may take, but it does give some idea of the fundamental qualities involved in any belief in poetic inspiration, namely - an extraordinary force, a state of enthusiasm, independence from art, abandon

to a superior power, and the essential "differentness" of the poet.

It is in its relation to the romantic movement that I shall treat specifically of the idea of poetic inspiration in the eighteenth century. It is impossible to separate a belief in poetic inspiration into its component parts without noticing how many of the terms used to express them are also used in characterizing the romantic movement. It is to be expected, therefore, that romantic writers should furnish the most interesting material for a study of poetic inspiration. We know that they had, in general, a greater tendency than other writers towards the state of mind which favors such a belief. It shall be the purpose of this study to examine that tendency, and from the work of the romantic writers to arrive at a conclusion as to their characteristic attitude toward the idea of poetic inspiration.

In order to explain or to understand the conception of poetic inspiration held by romantic writers, it will be necessary to consider whence they derived it. This implies a study of the various ideas of poetic inspiration as they had appeared in their greatest intensity from time to time. Such a study will be in the nature of an historical sketch beginning with classical literature and the earliest formulation of the theory of poetic inspiration, continuing through the later reappearance of the same ideas and taking account of the different additions to it. Some attempt will be made to correlate these ideas with the times in which they have arisen.

In coming to a consideration of the idea of poetic inspiration in the eighteenth century, it will be necessary to observe the character of the age, its conflicting tendencies, and its triumphant spirit, so that we may know what influences made it possible for the idea of poetic inspiration to prevail.

And, finally, upon the results of our study shall be based a conjecture as to the consequences to literature of belief in poetic inspiration.

CHAPTER II

An Historical Sketch of the Appearance of the Idea of Poetic Inspiration

A. Classical Literature

1. Mythology as a Source of the Idea of Poetic Inspiration

In tracing historically the appearance of the belief in poetic inspiration we must first search for it in mythology, the earliest history of human thought. For the very reason that mythology is the record of a people in an undeveloped intellectual state it is less influenced by fixed and artificial modes of thought and more dependent upon natural reactions. All life for the ancient Greeks was bound up with and explained by their religion. The forces of nature were all personified in the Greek Gods and so also were personified the intellectual forces.

In looking, then, in classical mythology for any one belief we must study the religious personifications with which it might be associated. The belief in poetic inspiration we find to be associated with the worship of Apollo and the Muses, and to a slightly less degree with the worship of Dionysus.

Apollo, as one of the greatest of Grecian deities may well be given the leading place in this discussion, with the other factors of mythology that concern poetic inspiration subordinated to the discussion of Apollo and treated

as either incidental to his worship or as secondary to him.

Apollo,¹ originally thought of as the god of the sun, came gradually, through a progression of ideas of him as god of productiveness, to be regarded as the god of prophecy and of song, and so of poetry. The laurel, the lyre, and the tripod were sacred to him.

Apollo's fame as the god of prophecy was connected with the Pythian oracle at Delphi. The story has it that Apollo,² immediately after his birth, slew the serpent Python which prevented access to the chasm of inspiring vapours on the side of Mount Parnassus. This chasm had originally been discovered from the strange fact that the goats feeding near it on the mountain side were thrown into convulsions by the vapours arising therefrom. The keeper of the goats, himself, upon approaching the chasm, became subject to the same intoxication, and, in a state of unconsciousness uttered strange raving words. The people, unable to understand his utterances, or the circumstances of his madness, ascribed his condition while inhaling the vapour to a divine inspiration; and, all too anxious to make the most of such a manifestation of divinity, they spread wide the fame of it, so that a temple was built on the site of the intoxication and worshipful rites established. The mysterious influence was uncertain in its origin, being variously ascribed to the Goddess Earth, to Neptune, to Themis and many others. After the interference of the Python, however, and Apollo's

1. The material for this study has been taken from Gayley's Classic Myths, from Andrew Lang's Myth, Ritual and Religion and from the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

2. Gayley, Classic Myths p. 474.

slaying of that monster, the Delphic oracle was usurped by Apollo himself, and the prophetic influence was assigned by the people to Apollo alone.

A priestess, called the Pythia, was appointed to abide at the vaporous place, to inhale the divine inspiration of Apollo, and to give utterance to words expressing its influence upon her. Her part had in it nothing of selection or of interpretation, but was only to surrender to the emotion that possessed her. She was duly prepared for this holy office by bathing in the clear waters of the neighboring Castalian spring. In honor to Apollo she was crowned with the holy laurel sacred to him, and was seated beside a tripod likewise adorned, which was placed over the very place whence the vapours arose. Her inspired words were then interpreted by a priest. The office of interpreter sometimes substituted the burning of the laurel and even the eating of it as means of divination, in place of the utterances of the priestess. In burning the laurel, its crackling was believed to be a good omen, and its silence, disastrous. The leaves of the laurel, moreover, when chewed, produced a divine madness by means of which the will of the Gods was made known. The laurel, as sacred to Apollo, was forbidden to profane use, and had always great significance in matters of prophecy. We shall see that it came to have, also, significance as a symbol of poetic inspiration.

Besides this oracle at Delphi, there were many other oracles held sacred to Apollo, through which he spoke to the people of the will of the Almighty Zeus. At Charos, oracular

responses were inspired by the waters of a spring. Certain favored persons are mentioned in mythology as having received the gift of prophecy from Apollo. Among these are Cassandra, the Cumean sibyl, Helenus, Melampus and Epimenides. Apollo's prophecies were given preferably by signs, but some, among whom Calchas is notable, communicated the will of the gods by signs.

In a study of poetic inspiration it is necessary that we should thus give some attention to the inspiration of prophecy, for in classical times the connection between prophecy and poetry was extremely close. It is the same type of enthusiasm that produces both. Primitive poetry as well as prophecy depends upon the surrender to un-self-conscious emotion, and the expression of feelings so strong that they seem to come from some greater power and to pass through the individual only as through a medium. They bear him upward and onward while they possess him, but leave him to sink back to his normal state when he has done them service of expression.

We think we know that all primitive emotional expression has been metrical. It is no surprise to us, then, to be told that the oracular responses at Delphi were metrical.¹ The fact that they were metrical came to make Apollo known as the god of song and of music, and, through his connection with the Muses, of poetry itself.

The names of Apollo and the Muses are closely associated, and we find mention of many a holy place sacred in common to Apollo and the Muses. The Muses, then, in our study of poetic inspiration, must come second only to Apollo.

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica.

The Muses, nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the personification of memory, were said to have been born in the Pieran mountains in Macedonia.¹ The Muses were originally regarded as the inspiring nymphs of springs and had, therefore, prophetic significance. They came later to be the goddesses of song, then of the different kinds of poetry. The Muses were thought of as singing-under the leadership of Apollo - around the banquet table of the gods. They sang of the glory of Zeus and of the wonderful deeds of gods and men. The Muses came to be clearly differentiated, with each her special province of poetry and the attributes that go with it. Calliope was the goddess of epic poetry, and is represented as carrying a wax tablet and pencil. Euterpe, as goddess of lyric poetry, has a double flute. Erato, to whom love poetry belongs, plays upon a small lyre. Melpomene with tragic mask and ivy wreath presides over tragedy. Thalia goddess of comedy has a comic mask and ivy wreath. Polyhymnia, veiled and in an attitude of thought is the goddess of sacred hymns. Terpsichore, with the lyre, leads the choral song and the dance. Clio, the goddess of history, bears a scroll. Urania, the goddess of astronomy, is distinguished by possession of a celestial globe.

As goddesses of song the Muses protected those who worshipped them unreservedly, but were swift in vengeance against anyone who challenged their supremacy. In this they were like their patron Apollo. To correspond to the story of Apollo

2. Gayley, Classic Myths.

changing the ears of Midas into asses ears because he had dared to admit the flute equal to Apollo's lyre, there is the story of the Muses' punishment of Thamyris. Thamyris, the Grecian bard, in unwarranted arrogance, boasted himself equal to the Muses. For this presumption the Muses made him blind, and took away his gift of song. This fate of Thamyris was indeed well calculated to impress upon the minds of the people that the power of song is only transmitted by the Muses to chosen individuals, and can be withdrawn by them at will. It became a rite therefore to show toward the Muses extreme humility, and to beg their favor and assistance before any attempted song. This worshipful rite was crystallized into the invocation.

The two chief places of the worship of the Muses were on the northern slope of Mount Olympus in Pieria, and the slope of Mount Helicon near Thespieae in Boeotia.¹ Their favorite haunts were said to be the springs of Castalia, Aganippe, and Hippocrene, all of which were regarded by the people as sacred to Apollo and the Muses.

It was on Mount Olympus that Apollo led the Muses in song for the banquetting of the gods. The Thespians on their worship of the Muses celebrated a festival in their honor in the sacred grove on Mount Helicon. Near Mount Helicon, beloved of the Muses, were the famous springs - Aganippe and Hippocrene. Hippocrene is connected in story with Pegasus, the horse of the Muses. Pegasus, the winged horse, was given by Minerva to the Muses² and taken by them to Boeotia. When there, Mount Helicon,

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica.

2. Gayley, Classic Myths.

entranced by the song of the Muses, began to rise to heaven. Pegasus - so the story goes - stamped with his hoof the rising ground. Where he had stamped a crystal spring gushed forth. This spring Hippocrene as well as other springs having connection in story with the Muses, was taken as a source of poetic inspiration.

The Muses, as well as being associated with Apollo the sun-god are also spoken of in connection with Dionysus, or Bacchus, the god of animal life and vegetation and especially of the vine. He is thought of as the god of the happiness and exuberance that comes from youth or from wine, and is represented as wearing a crown of vine leaves or ivy. He was worshipped with strange ecstatic rites that seemed to lift the people out of their consciousness into communion with the gods. It is in these rites of Dionysus that drama is supposed to have had its origin, and for this reason, perhaps, more than any other, he is associated with the Muses. We have noticed, in the differentiation of the Muses, that Melpomene and Thalia, the muses of drama, were given wreaths of ivy - the ivy sacred to Dionysus. The worship of Dionysus had in it always more of wildness, and more of madness than the worship of Apollo.¹ If a poet is to be regarded as inspired in the sense that the Dionysian revellers were inspired, a certain quality of insanity must belong to him. We shall notice presently how the critical writers, Plato, Longinus and others, emphasized this quality

1. Nietzsche, in his The Birth of Tragedy distinguishes strikingly between the power of Apollo and the power of Dionysus - Apollo is distinguished as a guiding power and Dionysus as an intoxication.

of the poet - this suspension of intellectual faculties - as well as the intensification more commonly thought of in connection with the inspiration of Apollo.

It may perhaps be well now to gather into smaller compass the factors of mythology expressive of a feeling in ancient times for divine poetic inspiration. The very belief was fostered essentially by the Greek ideas of nature and religion, and the correlation of all the powers of lower nature and of man with deities - the personifications of these powers. Everything that was at all, was from some^{one} of their gods. The creative expression of man, as well as the visible forces of nature, was assigned to presiding divinities. The power of the gods was believed to reach man through a series of intermediary forces, and, through certain material things sacred to the gods, to be communicated to men. Thus, the power of Apollo and Dionysus was delegated to the Muses who should distribute it to the worthy among men. Everything, then, connected in story with the Muses or the gods was supposed to have their power. In the case of poetic inspiration we may see how the various places or things associated with the belief in Apollo, Dionysus, or the Muses came to be regarded as sources or as symbols of inspiratory power. Throughout literature we shall find significant mention of the mounts of Parnassus, Helicon or Olympus, of the various holy springs or places of the oracles, of the lyre, the laurel, or the ivy, as denoting power of bestowing inspiration such as the Muses are called upon to give.

We may next, from the work of Greek and Roman critical writers derive the theory of poetic inspiration as it was

distilled from the mythology common to Greece and Rome.

2. The Appearance of the Idea of Poetic Inspiration in the Critical Theory and in the Poetical Practice of the Ancients.

From mythology, the first indication of belief in poetic inspiration, we may pass to material of a more definite nature. In a study of classical literature as a source of this belief, we have now to consider the theory of poetic inspiration as presented by ancient critical writers, and the evidence of the acceptance of this theory as shown in the work of ancient poets.

Plato, the first of the ancient writers to treat the subject at any length, has discussed all the factors of poetic inspiration that go to build up a classical theory of it. Accordingly, it will perhaps be best to group the critical material with which we have to do around the main points of Plato's discussions. This we may do in the way of comparison or of illustration.

Although the main trend of Plato's discussions is toward classifying the creative power of poetry as an occasional and sudden possession by an extraneous spirit, yet he has other views that it is desirable to consider. Related to his view of poetry is Plato's theory of reminiscence, or as it may be called, the theory of divine archetypes. We have an indication of this theory in the Meno. That dialog begins with the question "Whether virtue can be taught." The question is pursued with reference to the origin of knowledge and the perpetuation of it. The doctrine that all knowledge is within

the soul is stated by Socrates in the following portion of the dialog.¹

Socrates - I have heard from certain wise men who spoke of things divine that -

Meno - What did they say?

Socrates - They spoke of a glorious truth, as I conceive.

Meno - What was that and who were they?

Socrates - Some of them were priests and priestesses, who had studied how they might be able to give a reason of their profession; there have been poets also, such as the poet Pindar and other inspired men. And what they say is ---- that the word of man is immortal and at one time has an end ----- and at another time is born again, but is never destroyed----- The soul then being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that there are, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue and about everything; for as all nature is akin and the soul has learned all things, there is no difficulty in her eliciting, or as men say learning, all out of a single recollection,-----for all inquiry and all learning is but recollection."

This doctrine, however, though valuable as an indication of views more explicitly stated in other of Plato's dialogs, is not here accepted as a solution of the question "Whether virtue can be taught." The result of the discussion, as Socrates states it,² is "that virtue is neither natural nor acquired, but an instinct given by God to the virtuous. Nor is the instinct accompanied by reason -----." As illustration of this conclusion he mentions,² together with other powers, the power of the poet -

1. The Meno 81. Jowett's translation.

2. The Meno 99. Jowett's translation Vol. 1 p. 275.

Socrates - But if not by knowledge, the only alternative is, that statesmen must have guided states by right opinion, which is in politics what divination is in religion; for diviners and also prophets say many things truly, but they know not what they say----- and may we not, Meno, truly call those men divine, who, having no understanding, yet succeed in many a grand deed and word?

Meno - Certainly.

Socrates - Then we shall also be right in calling those divine whom we were just now speaking of as diviners and prophets, as well as all poets.

Turning again to Plato's theory of reminiscence we find it set forth in the *Phaedo* during the discussion of which Cebes "Your favorite doctrine, Socrates, says to Socrates, that knowledge is simply recollection if true, also necessarily implies a previous time in which we learned that which we now recollect."¹

The subject of reminiscence is treated of with greatest sympathy and enthusiasm in the *Phaedrus*. The following selected passage may show more clearly than those that have gone before, the relation of the theory of reminiscence to poetic power.

"-----And this is the recollection of those things which our soul once saw when in company with God - when looking down from above on that which we now call being and upwards toward the true being. And therefore the mind of the philosopher alone has wings; and this is just, for he is always, according to the measure of his abilities, clinging in recollection to those things in which God abides, and in beholding which he is what he is. And he who employs aright these memories is ever being

1. *Phaedo* 72. Jowett p. 399

initiated into perfect mysteries and alone becomes truly perfect. But as he forgets earthly interests and is rapt in the divine, the vulgar deem him mad, and rebuke him; they do not see that he is inspired."¹

We see by this that Plato gives to philosophy the most perfect recollection of truth. He says that if one who has walked with the gods comes to the earth his soul shall belong to a man of the nature most nearly corresponding to the degree of truth he has attained among the gods. "-----the soul which has seen most of truth shall come to the birth as a philosopher, or artist, or musician, or lover, that which has seen truth in the second degree shall be a righteous king or warrior or lord; -----to the sixth a poet or imitator will be appropriate."²

This classification of the poet so very low in the scale, as belonging to the sixth of the nine classes seems incongruous to us. We should rather place him in the first class as one with the "philosopher or artist or musician or lover." The low classification comes evidently from Plato's temporary consideration of the poet as a mere imitator. That Plato did not always use the term poetry as meaning merely imitation, but was inclined sometimes to give it a greater significance and a higher dignity is shown in the following passage from The Symposium:

"There is poetry, which, as you know, is complex and manifold. And all creation or passage of non-being into being

1. Phaedrus 249. Jowett p. 554.

2. Phaedrus 248. Jowett p. 553.

is poetry or making, and the processes of all art are creative; and the masters of all arts are poets."¹

However that may be, and whatever Plato meant by poetry, we are certainly to be interested in Plato's description, already quoted, of the person who remembers best the essential truth - "he who employs aright these memories is ever being initiated into perfect mysteries and alone becomes truly perfect. But as he forgets earthly interests and is rapt in the divine the vulgar deem him mad, and rebuke him; they do not see that he is inspired."²

This brings us to a consideration of the madness of inspiration, of which Plato has much to say. We find that in the opinion of Plato's time madness was not simply an evil. It was not a misfortune, but a blessing, and was worthy of the highest respect. It was regarded as greatly superior to reason in its effects and much to be desired by those who would accomplish great things. The kinds of worthy madness are distinguished by Plato in a manner to save the term from use in reproach. From the Phaedrus we may select the following passages to illustrate this high regard for the madness of inspiration. "---there is also a madness which is the special gift of Heaven and the source of the chiefest blessings among men. For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestess of Dodona, when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life but in their senses few or none."³

1. The Symposium 205. Jowett p. 497

2. Phaedrus 249. Jowett p. 554.

3. Phaedrus 244. Jowett p. 549, 540.

"There will be more reason in appealing to the ancient inventors of names, who if they had thought madness a disgrace or dishonor, would never have called prophecy, which is the noblest of arts, by the very same name -- as madness, thus inseparably connecting them; but they must have thought that there was an inspired madness which was no disgrace ----- and in proportion as prophecy is higher and more perfect than divination both in name and reality, in the same proportion as the Ancients testify, is madness superior to a sane mind, for the one is only of human, but the other of divine origin."¹

"There is also a third kind of madness, which is a possession of the Muses; this enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyric and all other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, not being inspired and having no touch of madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the same man is nowhere at all when he enters into rivalry with the madman."²

Reminding us of the quotation just given and particularly related to the expression "delicate and virgin soul" we find later this passage in Tacitus:

"The poetic soul withdraws into habitations of purity and innocence and in these hallowed dwellings finds its delight. Here is the cradle of eloquence, here its holy of holies; this

1. Phaedrus 244. Jowett p. 549, 540.

2. Phaedrus 245. Jowett p. 550.

was the form and fashion in which the faculty of utterance first won its way with mortal men, streaming into hearts that were as yet pure and free from any stain of guilt; poetry was the language of the oracles."¹

From the idea of poetry as the language of oracles and from the close relation of poetry and prophecy comes the idea of the poet as an unconscious and uncomprehending transmitter of whatever is divinely given him to say. This idea we find expressed as follows in the Apology of Plato:

I went to the poets; tragic dithyrambic and all sorts. ----I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them - thinking that they would teach me something. Will you believe me? I am almost ashamed to speak of this, but still I must say that there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. They showed me in an instant that not by wisdom do poets write poetry but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like divines or soothsayers who also say many fine things but do not understand the meaning of them."²

Perhaps the most complete statement of the theory of the madness of inspiration is to be found in the Ion. Socrates says to Ion:

"This gift which you have of speaking excellently about Homer is not an art, but as I was just saying, an inspiration; there is a divinity moving you, like that in the stone which

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1. Tacitus, Dialogus, 12 - Translation by William Peterson p. 47.
 2. Apology 22. Jowett p. 320.

Euripedes calls a magnet, but which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea. For that stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a similar power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you see a number of pieces of iron and rings suspended from one another so as to form quite a long chain: and all of them derive their power of suspension from the original stone. Now this is like the Muse, who first gives to men Inspiration herself and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration from them. For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not as works of art, but because they are inspired and possessed: like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers, when they are under the influence of Dionysus, but not when they are in their right mind. And the soul of the lyric poet does the same, as they themselves tell us; for they tell us that they gather their strains from honeyed fountains out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; thither like the bees they wing their way. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles ----- for not by art does the poet sing but by power divine ----- God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses divines and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know that they speak not of themselves, who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God is the speaker, and that through

them he is conversing with us. And Tynnichus the Chalcidian affords a striking instance of what I am saying: he wrote nothing that any one would care to remember but the famous poem which is in everyone's mouth, and is one of the finest poems ever written, and is certainly an invention of the Muses, as he himself says. For in this way the God would seem to indicate to us and not allow us to doubt that these beautiful poems are not human or the work of man but divine and the work of God; and that the poets are only the interpreters of the gods by whom they are severally possessed. Was not this the lesson which the God intended to teach when by the mouth of the worst of poets he sang the best of songs?"¹

Surely "here is God's plenty" and with this we might relate the separate utterances of many another writer who touched upon only parts of it. From Longinus we have this contribution:

"For many men are carried away by the spirit of others as if inspired, just as it is related of the Pythian princess when she approaches the tripod, where there is a rift in the ground which, they say, exhales divine vapor. By heavenly power thus communicated she is impregnated and straightway delivers in virtue of the afflatus. Similarly from the great natures of the men of old there are borne in upon the souls of those who emulate them, as from sacred caves, what we may describe as effluences, so that even those who seem little likely to be possessed are thereby inspired and succumb to the spell of the others' greatness."²

1. Ion 533, 534 Jowett pp. 223, 224.

2. Longinus On the Sublime XIII - Translation by Rys Roberts.

From Aristotle we glean this remark:

"Hence poetry implies either a happy gift of nature or a strain of madness. In the one case a man can take the mould of any character; in the other, he is lifted out of his proper self."¹

It seems that whatever form poetic inspiration might take the poetic power was always something beyond the control of the poet himself, and above his knowledge. We have considered the inspiration of divine memories and also the inspiration of a sudden possessing spirit. We have still to learn of the making of poetry in obedience to divinely spoken injunction. This idea which we primarily associate with the story of Caedmon and with Milton's adaptation of the call of Isaiah we find in all its completeness in Plato's Phaedo:

"Cebes said: I am very glad indeed, Socrates, that you mentioned the name of Aesop. For that reminds me of a question which has been asked by others, and was asked of me only the day before yesterday by Evenus the poet and as he will be sure to ask again you may as well tell me what I should say to him, if you would like him to have an answer. He wanted to know why you, who never before wrote a line of poetry, now that you are in prison are putting Aesop into verse, and also composing that hymn in honor of Apollo.

"Tell him, Cebes, he replied, that I had no idea of rivalling him or his poems; which is the truth for I knew I could not do that. But I wanted to see whether I could purge away a scruple which I felt about certain dreams. In the course

1. Aristotle Poetics XVII. Butcher's edition p. 63.

of my life I have often had intimations in dreams "that I should make music." The same dream came to me sometimes in one form and sometimes in another, but always saying the same or nearly the same words: Make and cultivate music, said the dream. And hitherto I had imagined that this was only intended to exhort and encourage me in the study of philosophy, which has always been the pursuit of my life and is the noblest and best of music ----- But I was not certain of this as the dream might have meant music in the popular sense of the word, and being under sentence of death, and the festival giving me respite, I thought that I should be safer if I satisfied the scruple, and in obedience to the dream, composed a few verses before I departed. And first I made a hymn in honor of the god of the festival, and then considering that a poet, if he is really to be a poet or maker, should not only put words together but make stories, and as I have no invention, I took some fables of Aesop, which I had ready at hand and knew, and turned them into verse."¹

As the instrument of divinity, whether by memory, possession, or injunction, the poet was never denied respect in ancient times. The epithet divine was almost without fail joined to the name poet, in the way that Plato speaks of "the divine Homer."² Tacitus explains the divine nature of poets by the close relation between the poets and the gods:

"And to none was greater fame or more exalted rank accorded than to them, first in high heaven itself; for they were the prophets, it was said, of the oracles of the gods, and

1. Phaedo 60, 61. Jowett pp. 386, 387.

2. Phaedo 94. Jowett pp. 424.

were present as guests at their banquets; and thereafter at the courts of godborn holy kings, in whose company we never hear of a pleader but of an Orpheus, a Linus, and if you care to go farther back, Apollo himself."¹

The theory of poetic inspiration among the ancients was, in brief, that the inclination to make poetry and the ability to do so came from without the will of the poet, the passive medium through whom the divinity should speak. Conscious art had no part in poetic skill, or, at any rate, was useless without the help of superior powers. Of these superior powers then, the poet must gain favor before he could hope to accomplish anything. They must be propitiated and invoked, and to them must be attributed the work's success.

We find in the copious invocations to the Muses abundant proof of the belief in poetic inspiration. We find invocations to the Muses and references to them throughout the work of the poets, as though they would have us believe indeed that it was the Muse who sang.

We may quote from the work of Homer illustrations of the belief in poetic inspiration. The beginning of the Iliad is an invocation:

"Sing Goddess, the wrath of Achilles Peleus' son,
the ruinous wrath that brought on the Achaians woes innumerable--
--"²

In the midst of the narration, too, there are appeals for the prompting of the Muse. One of them is the following:

1. Tacitus Dialogus 12. Translation by Wm. Peterson p. 47.

2. Lang, Leaf, and Myers, translation p. 1.

"Now tell me, O Muse, who among them was first and foremost of warriors alike and horses that followed the sons of Atreus."¹

The Odyssey begins with the customary invocation thus:

"Tell me, Muse, of that man, so ready at need, who wandered far and wide, after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy-----Of these things, goddess, daughter of Zeus, whencesoever thou hast heard thereof, declare thou even unto us."²

But more important than this are the discussions concerning the minstrels, who were held in high regard as being divinely inspired. We have expressed belief in inspiration in Teleniachus' answer to Penelope when she has rebuked the minstrel for singing so pitiful a strain:

"O my mother, why then dost thou grudge the sweet minstrel to gladden us as his spirit moves him? It is not minstrels who are in fault, but Zeus, methinks is in fault, who gives to men, that live by bread, as he will. As for him it is no blame if he sings the ill faring of the Danaans."³

In the words of Odysseus the high regard for the minstrel is expressed:

"For minstrels from all men on earth get their need of honour and worship; inasmuch as the Muse teacheth them the

1. Lang, Leaf, and Myers, translation p. 44.

2. Odyssey I. Butcher and Lang translation p. 1.

3. Odyssey I. Butcher and Lang translation p. 11.

paths of song, and loveth the tribe of minstrels.-----
 Demodacus, I praise thee for above all mortal men, whether it
 be the Muse, the daughter of Zeus, that taught thee or even
 Apollo, for right duly dost thou chant the faring of the
 Achaeans.-----I will be thy witness among all men, how the
 god of his grace hath given thee the gift of wondrous song."¹

Homer's comment on this speech is: "So spake he, and
 the minstrel, being stirred by the god, began and showed forth
 his minstrelsy."¹

As further representation of the belief in poetic
 inspiration as it is shown by ancient poets we may quote some
 of the work of Pindar. After this manner he invokes the Muse:

"Oh Divine Muse, our mother, I pray thee come unto
 this Dorian isle Aegina stranger thronged, for the sacred
 festival of the Nemean games: for by the waters of Asopos young
 men await thee, skilled to sing sweet songs of triumph, and
 desiring to hear thy call."²

Another of Pindar's invocations is:

"From Apollo at Sikyon will we lead our triumph forth,
 ye Muses, unto the new-made city of Aitna, where doors are
 opened wide to greet the invading guests, even to the fortunate
 house of Chromios. Come claim for him a song of sweetness."³

Pindar calls upon a Muse to be present at whatever
 place a festival is to be celebrated or a hero praised. His

1. Odyssey VIII. ' Butcher and Lang translation, pp. 130,131.
2. Translation of Pindar's Odes by Ernest Myers - Nemean Ode III.
3. Ibid. Nemean Ode IX.

Odes are full of beseeching and of grateful speeches to the Muses. He says, "Apollo it is who-----giveth the Muse to whomever he will,"¹ and to the presence of the Muse with him he attributes his success and his skill in composing:

"Tyndareus' hospitable sons and lovely haired Helen shall I please assuredly in doing honour to renowned Akragas by a hymn upraised for Theron's Olympian crown; for hereunto hath the Muse been present with me that I should find out a fair new device, fitting to feet that move in Dorian time the Komosvoices' splendid strain."²

It takes not much selection to find examples of the invocation in classical poetry, for to invoke the Muses was regarded, seemingly, as a necessary procedure on the part of the ancient poet. No doubt the invocation was, in many cases, merely a conventional form, as we shall see it came to be later, and as it appears to be in Virgil's Aeneid, but in the beginning the custom certainly arose from a sincere belief in the inspiring power of divinity, and a desire to gain divine assistance.

Of the invocation as a custom Quintilian speaks as follows:

"And if no one is surprised that the greatest poets have often invoked the Muses, not only at the beginning of their work, but on advancing in their course, and arriving at some point of great importance have renewed their addresses and

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1. Translation of Pindar's Odes by Ernest Myers - Pythian Ode V.
 2. Ibid - Olympian Ode III.

used, as it were, fresh solicitations, I myself should surely be pardoned also if I now do that which I omitted to do when I entered on my subject; and call the deities to my aid, and especially him than whom there is no deity more auspicious or more peculiarly favorable to learning, in order that he may inspire me with ability proportioned to the expectation which he has raised of me, may propitiously and kindly support me, and render me in reality such as he has supposed me to be."¹

From this study of classical literature we have found in mythology the origin of the belief in poetic inspiration in the critical writers the formulation of that belief into theory, and in the poets we have found expressed the acceptance of the belief.

We might quote many passages from classical literature to illustrate the ancient belief in poetic inspiration, but since Meric Casaubon in his book on Enthusiasm has quoted so extensively and has made so many references to the belief as it was manifested in ancient times, it seems scarcely necessary for us here to go any more deeply into the subject.

We need only mention the fact that the Greek ideas of inspiration, as they were transmitted into Roman literature tended to be reduced into lifeless and cold formalism. The spirit that animated the Grecian expressions of inspiration was lost among the more consciously law-observing Romans.

1. Quintilian Institutes. Bk. IV. Introduction 4

B. The Renaissance Return to Classical Ideas of
Inspiration and the Annexation of Christian
Inspiratory Sources.

1. The Idea of Poetic Inspiration as Expressed by Renaissance Poetry.

The Renaissance poets expressed their feeling for poetic inspiration in classical terms. The appreciation of pagan culture which came with the revival of ancient learning was evidenced in the poetry of the Elizabethans by an enthusiastic use of mythological imagery. With the knowledge of classical thought came the celebration of the ancient idea of poetic inspiration. It was in terms of mythology that the Elizabethans first expressed this idea. Though they naturally did not believe in the ancient mythology, yet it furnished beautiful metaphors for expressing actual feelings. We have every reason to believe that the Elizabethans with their love for spontaneity and abandon were in thorough sympathy with the idea of poetic inspiration. We may quote a few examples of the Elizabethans' metaphorical expression of the idea of poetic inspiration.

"O fayrest Phoebus! father of the Muse!
If ever I did honour thee aright
Or sing the thing that mote they mind delight
Doe not they servants simple boone refuse;
But let this day, let this one day be mine."¹

These expressions, for the most part, take the form of invocations such as the foregoing and the following from Spenser's writing:

1. Spenser. Epithalamion.

"Wherefore my pype, albee rude Pan thou please,
 Yet for thou pleasest not where most I would;
 And thou, unlucky Muse, that wons't to ease
 My musinc mind yet canst not when thou should;
 Both pype and Muse shall sore the while aby,¹
 So broke his oaten pype and downe did lye.¹

Even more elaborately metaphorical than these examples from Spenser's works is the following from a sonnet of Sir Philip Sidney:

Highway, since you my chief Parnassus be,
 And that my Muse, to some ears not unsweet,
 Tempers her words to trampling horses feet
 More oft than to a chamber melody.
 Now blessed you bear onward blessed me,
 To her, where I my heart, safe-left shall meet,
 My Muse and I must you of duty greet
 With thanks and wishes wishing thankfully.²

We might illustrate at great length the Elizabethan use of mythological imagery to express the idea of poetic inspiration. Since this species of metaphor is so abundant, however, we may restrict our quotation to only the most notable and pleasing ones. Drayton's expression is one of these.

Next Marlowe, bathed in the Thespian springs
 Had in him those brave translunary things
 That the first poets had; his raptures were
 All ayre and fire which made his verses cleere
 For that fine madness did he still retain,
 That rightly should possess a poet's brain.

In Shakespeare's own words we have the poet described as one with the lover and the madman in "fine frenzy."

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
 Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.
 The lunatic, the lover and the poet
 Are of imagination all compact.
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
 That is the madman; the lover, all as frantic,

1. Spenser. Shepherd's Calendar.

2. Sidney. Sonnet LXXXIV.

Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
 The poets eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from
 earth to heaven;
 And as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.¹

The Elizabeth poetry, in general, was likely to celebrate the madness of the poet. But with the explanation of this madness it seems not to have been much concerned. Intent on following the injunction of Sir Philip Sidney's Muse "Look in thy heart and write," the poets did not inquire with any great care into the reason for their power. It is in critical theory, as such, apart from the poetry, that we must look for any definite statements indicating a belief in poetic inspiration.

2. Critical Theory of the Renaissance as it is Concerned with the Idea of Poetic Inspiration.

The idea of poetic inspiration in the Renaissance was part of a general body of critical theory common to Italy, France, and England.² The re-awakened interest in poetry for its own sake which had begun with the Italian Renaissance had been reproduced very soon in France and in England. In the same way literary criticism began first in Italy only to reappear later in very similar form in the other countries. Whether the resemblance in critical theory is due, as Professor Spingarn suggests, to direct transmission, or, as Professor Saintsbury

1. Midsummer Night's Dream. Act V, Scene I.

2. Spingarn says that from Italy a unified body of poetic rules and theories had passed into France, England, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Holland, and Scandinavia - Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, p. 311.

is inclined to believe, to mere parallelism, there are many striking points of similarity. Gregory Smith, in his introduction to the Elizabethan Critical Essays says: "Whatever objections may be taken to the detailed evidence advanced by enthusiasts for the Italian origin of Elizabethan criticism there can be no doubt of the general contention."¹

The part of critical theory we are now immediately concerned with, the idea of poetic inspiration, had a prominent place in Renaissance thought. The point of view in regard to it is practically the same in all the Renaissance criticism. The similarity in theory in the various countries was probably due to the fact that all of them had to deal with similar problems. Professor Spingarn begins his book on Literary Criticism in the Renaissance by saying: "The first problem of Renaissance criticism was the justification of imaginative literature."

The Renaissance recovery of ancient literature, certainly, could avail little without a general appreciation of its accomplishment. Standing in the way of such an appreciation was the wide spread contempt for all imaginative creation. Professor Spingarn enumerates several causes for the Mediaeval distrust of literature.² These may here be suggested briefly. The popular literature had fallen into such degradation that it was unworthy of consideration. Classical literature was not yet known well enough to be appreciated, and because of its pagan elements it was held in disapproval by the church. There

1. Introduction LXXVIII

2. Literary Criticism in the Renaissance. p. 4 ff.

were serious theoretical objections to poetry because of its so called immorality and untruthfulness.

Against these objections, and to break up the general indifference, the Renaissance defense of poetry was undertaken. In the defences of the Italians, of the Pleiade in France, and of the Elizabethan English, the contempt for poetry was combatted chiefly by the emphasis placed upon the exalted nature and function of poetry, and its divine origin. Professor Spingarn speaks of "the impassioned defences of poetry by Petrarck, Boccaccio, and Caluccio Salutati, in which its vital impulse was conceived to be at one with that of God himself!"¹

The sort of work in which such praise was embodied gave way in the sixteenth century to the more systematic sort of treatise written by Vida, Daniello, Minturno, Scaliger, Castelvetro, and others who formed the great body of Italian criticism. One of the great principles of Italian theory was classical imitation. This principle, whether directly transmitted or not, was foremost in the doctrine of the French Renaissance expressed by the group known as the Pleiade. The theory of poetic inspiration is closely dependent upon this classical imitation and the reverence for the ancients which it awakened. Of this influence Professor Spingarn says:

"With the imitation of classical literature there came the renewal of the ancient subjects of inspiration; and from this there proceeded a high and dignified conception of the poet's office. Indeed, many of the more general critical ideas of the Pleiade spring from the desire to justify the

1. Literary Criticism in the Renaissance p. 312.

function of poetry, and to magnify its importance."¹

In this study we are, of course, to be concerned with the English Renaissance - yet Ronsard, the moving spirit of the Pleiade, so thoroughly believes in the inspiration of poetry, and so sympathetically expresses the feeling for the high office of the poet, that it might not be amiss to quote here from his work before taking up the Elizabethan writers. We can do this with particular appropriateness since his influence upon the English defenders of poetry is so demonstrable.

We may make the following selection from Professor Spingarn's longer quotation of the Abrege:²

"Above all things you will hold the Muses in reverence, yea, in singular veneration, and you will never let them serve in matters that are dishonest, or mere jests or injudicious libels; but you will hold them dear and sacred, as the daughters of Jupiter, that is, God, who by His holy grace has through them first made known to ignorant people the excellencies of his majesty..... Now since the Muses do not care to lodge in a soul unless it is good, holy, and virtuous, you should try to be of a good disposition, not wicked, scowling, and cross, but animated by a gentle spirit; and you should not let anything enter your mind that is not superhuman and divine. You should have, in the first place conceptions that are high, grand and beautiful, and not trailing on the ground; for the principal part of poetry consists in invention, which comes as much from a beautiful nature as from the reading of good and ancient authors. If you undertake any great work, you will show your-

1. Spingarn Literary Criticism in the Renaissance p. 174.

2. Spingarn Literary Criticism in the Renaissance p. 193.

self devout and fearing God, commencing it either with His name or by any other which represents some effects of his majesty, after the manner of the Greek poets-----for the Muses, Apollo, Mercury, Pallas, and other similar deities, merely represent the powers of God, to which the first men gave several names for the diverse effects of His incomprehensible majesty."

We have here the exalted idea of the consecration of the poet, the idea that has been expressed so often and so beautifully. Longinus has named grand and lofty conception as the first source of the sublime. We have found the idea in Plato, notably in our quotation concerning the "possession of the Muses" that "enters into a delicate and virgin soul." We found corresponding to this Tacitus' belief that "the poetic soul withdraws into habitations of purity and innocence." Ronsard has elaborated these ancient views and has anticipated the expressions of many who were to follow him. He has given a new freshness and sincerity to views that tended to become merely conventional.

One part of the Renaissance justification of poetry was the Elizabethan defence of it against the attacks of Puritanism. Gregory Smith says, "Elizabethan criticism arose in controversy."¹ He says further that the importance of the Puritan attack "lies in the fact that they called forth a reasoned defence, and compelled their opponents to examine the principles of poetry."¹ This reasoned defence and examination of the principles resulted in the exaltation of poetry. The

1. Gregory Smith, Elizabethan Critical Essay, introduction, XIV.

greatest arguments of defence were based upon the nature of poetry and its historical importance. It is in this connection that we find what we are now interested in, the great emphasis placed upon the divine origin of poetry and its celestial inspiration.

Sir Thomas Lodge in 1579 wrote his Defence of Poetry in answer to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse. The defence is one of great warmth and highest eulogy for poetry. After citing instances of the great honor given to poets in olden times he says:¹

"It is a pretty sentence, yet not so pretty as pithy, Poeta nascitur, Orator fit: as who should say, Poetry cometh from above, from a heavenly seat of a glorious God, into an excellent creature man; an Orator is but made by exercise. For, if we examine well what befell Ennius among the Romans, and Hesiodus among his countrymen the Grecians, how they came to their knowledge whence they received their heavenly fury, the first will tell us that, sleeping on the Mount of Parnassus, he dreamed he became a poet; the next will assure you that it cometh not by labor, neither that night watchings bringeth it, but that we must have it whence he fetched it, which was (he saith) from a well of the Muses which Persius calleth Caballinus, a draught whereof drewe him to his perfection; so of a shepherd he became an eloquent poet. Well then you see that it cometh not by exercise of play making, neither insertion of gauds, but from nature, and from above: and I hope that Aristotle hath sufficiently taught you that Natura nihil fecit frustra.

1. For convenience in transcribing the spelling of the following selections has been modernized.

Persius was made a poet Divino furore percitus; and whereas the poets were said to call for the Muses help, their meaning was no other, as Todocus Badius reporteth, but to call for heavenly inspiration from above to direct their endeavors. Neither were it good for you to set light by the name of a Poet, since the offspring from whence it cometh is so heavenly. Sibilla in her answers to Aeneas against here will, as the poet telleth us, was possessed with this fury; yea, weigh considerately but of the writing of poets, and you shall see that when their matter is most heavenly their style is most lofty, a strange token of the wonderful efficacy of the same. I would make a long discourse unto you of Plato's four furies but I leave them."¹

This has a sincerity that makes it seem something more than a mere citation of ancient beliefs. Rather more detached than this is Sir Philip Sidney's attitude toward the divine nature of poetry, though he presents the argument in all respect to it. In his An Apology for Poetry, written in 1583 Sidney defends poetry rather upon its intrinsic and sensible merits than upon its historical significance. However, he does refer to the ancient honor which belonged to the poet, as the following pass age will show:

"Since the authors of most of our sciences were the Romans, and before them the Greeks, let us a little stand upon their authorities, but even so far as to see what names they have given unto this now scorned skill.

1. Gregory Smith. Elizabethan Critical Essays. Vol. I, p. 71, 72.

"Among the Romans a Poet was called Vates, which is as much as a Diviner, fore-seer, or Prophet,----- so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart ravishing knowledge. And so far were they carried into the admiration thereof, that they thought in the chanceable hitting upon any such verses great foretokens of their following fortunes were placed.-----And altogether not without ground, since both the oracles at Delphos and Sibillas prophecies were wholly delivered in verses. For that same exquisite observing of number and measure in words, and that high flying liberty of conceit proper to the Poet, did seem to have some divine force in it."¹

William Webbe in his Discourse of English Poetry, in 1586, presents very sympathetically this ancient doctrine of poetic inspiration. He says of poetry:

"The beginning of it, as appeareth by Plato, was of a virtuous and most devout purpose; who witnesseth that by occasion of meeting of a great company of young men, to solemnize the feasts which were called Panegeryca, and were wont to be celebrated every fifth year, there they that were most pregnant in wit and indeed with great gifts of wisdom and knowledge in Music above the rest, did use commonly to make goodly verses, measured according to the sweetest notes of Music, containing the praise of some noble virtue or of immortality, or of some such thing of greatest estimation: which unto them seemed so heavenly and joyous a thing that thinking such men to be inspired with some divine instinct from heaven they called them Vates.-----Such was the estimation of this Poetry

1. Gregory Smith Elizabethan Critical Essays, Vol. I, p. 154.

at those times, that they supposed all wisdom and knowledge to be included mystically in that divine instinction wherewith they thought their Vates to be inspired. Whereupon, throughout the noble work of those most excellent Philosophers before named, are the authorities of Poets very often alleged. And Cicero in his Tusculane questions is of that mind, that a Poet cannot express verses abundantly, sufficiently and fully, neither his eloquence can flow pleasantly, or his words sound well and plenteously, without celestial instruction."¹

George Puttenham in The Art of English Poesie, written in 1589, makes daring claims for the poet. In this manner he begins the essay:

"A Poet is as much to say as a maker. And our English name well conforms with the Greek word ---- for they call a maker Poeta. Such as (by way of resemblance and reverently) we may say of God; who without any travail to his divine imagination made all the world of nought, nor also by any pattern or mould, as the Platonics with their Ideas do fantastically suppose. Even so the very Poet makes and contrives out of his own brain both the verse and matter of his poem.-----And this science in his perfection can not grow but by some divine instinct - the Platonics call it furor - or by excellencie of nature and complexion; or by great subtilty of the spirits and wit; or by much experience and observation

1. Gregory Smith. Elizabethan Critical Essays, Vol. I, pp. 230, 231, 232. Francis Meres repeats this same argument and the citation to Cicero in the Palladis Tamia. Gregory Smith Vol. II, p. 313. Sir Thomas Elyot had used it much earlier than either of these in his Governor Croft's edition, p. 122.

of the world, and course of kind; or peradventure, by all or most part of them----- It is therefore of Poets to be conceived that if they be able to devise and make all these things of themselves, without any subject of verity, that they be (by manner of speech) as creating gods."¹

In George Chapman's preface to Homer there is this discussion:

"Spondanus, one of the most desertful Commentars of Homer, calls all sorts of men learned to be judicial beholders of this more than Artificial and no less than Divine Rapture, than which nothing can be imagined more full of soul and human extraction: for what is here prefigured by our miraculous Artist but the universal world, which being so spacious and almost unmeasurable, one circlet of a shield represents and embraceth? In it heaven turns, the stars shine, the earth is enflowered, the sea swells and rageth, cities are built, one in the happiness and sweetness of peace, the other in open war and the terrors of ambush: and all these so lively proposed, as not without reason many in times past have believed that all these things have in them a kind of voluntary motion ----- nor can I be resolved that their opinions be sufficiently refuted by Aristonicus, for so are all things here described by our divinest Poet as if they consisted not of hard and solid metals, but of a truly living and moving soul ---- for Homer's Poems were writ from a full fury, an absolute and full soul, Virgil's out of a courtly, laborious, and altogether imitatory spirit."²

1. Gregory Smith - Elizabethan Essays, Vol. II, p. 3, 4.

2. Gregory Smith - Elizabethan Essays, Vol. II, p. 297, 298.

In this comparison of Homer and Virgil by Chapman, we have suggested the always interesting controversy between genius and art. We shall notice a further conflict of these in the eighteenth century - a conflict of greatest importance to the belief in poetic inspiration.

In the Elizabethan defences of poetry there was another argument fully as characteristic and as much emphasized as that drawn from the precedent of the Greeks and Romans. This argument seemed to found itself upon Biblical authority. The defenders of poetry argued for the excellence of poetry and the exalted office of the poet from an observance of the poetical character of the scriptures. Thus, Thomas Lodge passes easily from a consideration of poetry as the language of oracles to that of poetry as the language of the Scriptures:

"What made Austin so much affectate that heavenly fury? not folly, for ----- his zeal was in setting up of the house of God, not in affectate eloquence; he wrote not, he accounted not, he honoured not so much that famous poetry which we praise, without cause, for, if it be true that Horace reporteth in his book de Arte Poetica, all the answers of the Oracles were in verse. Among the precise Jews you shall find poets; and for more majesty Sibilla will prophecy in verse. Beroaldus can witness with me that David was a poet and that his vein was in imitating (as St. Jerome witnesseth) Horace, Flaccus, and Pindarus; sometimes his verse runneth in an Iambes foot, anon he hath recourse to a Saphic vein----- Ask Josephus, and he will tell you that Isaiah, Job and Solomon vouchafed poetical practices for-----their verse was hexameter

and pentameter. Inquire of Cassiodorus, he will say that all the beginning of Poetry proceeded from the Scripture."¹

Sir Philip Sidney expresses substantially the same argument in the following selection from his Apology for Poetry.

"And may not I presume a little further to shew the reasonableness of this word Vates? And say that the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem? If I do, I shall not do it without the testimony of great learned men, both ancient and modern: but even the name Psalms will speak for me, which, being interpreted, is nothing but songs. Then that it is fully written in meter, as all learned Hebricians agree, although the rules be not yet fully found. Lastly and principally, his handling his prophecy, which is merely poetical. For what else is the awaking his musical instruments; the often and free changing of persons; his notable Prosapopeias, when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in his majesty; his telling of the Beast's joyfulness, and hills leaping but a heavenly poesie, wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unseparakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cheered by faith."²

Further he says:

"The chief both in antiquity and excellency were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms, Solomon in his song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, Moses and Deborah in their Hymns,

1. Gregory Smith - Elizabethan Critical Essays, pp. 70, 71.

2. Gregory Smith - Elizabethan Critical Essays, Vol. I, pp. 154, 155.

and the writer of Job; which, beside other, the learned Emanuel Tremetius and Franciscus Junius do entitle the poetical part of the Scripture. Against these none will speak that hath the hold Ghost in due holy reverence."¹

Puttenham speaks less elaborately, but presents the argument, with a definite conclusion:

"King David also and Solomon his son and many other of the holy Prophets wrote in meters, and used to sing them to the harp, although to many of us, ignorant of the Hebrew language and phrase, and not observing it, the same seem but a prose. It can not be therefore that any scorn or indignity should justly be offered to so noble, profitable, ancient, and divine a science as Poesie is."²

Sir John Harington, also, in his Brief Apology for Poetry makes use of Scriptural authority:

"But now for the authority of verse, if it be not sufficient to say for them that the greatest Philosophers and gravest Senators that ever were have used them both in their speeches and in their writings, that precepts of all Arts have been delivered in them, that verse is as ancient a writing as prose, and indeed more ancient in respect that the oldest works extant be verse, as Orpheus, Linus, Hesiodus and others beyond memory of man or mention almost of history; if none of these will serve for the credit of it, yet let this serve that some part of the Scripture was written in verse, as the Psalms of David and certain other songs of Deborah, of Solomon and others, which the learnedest divines do affirm to be

1. Gregory Smith. Elizabethan Critical Essays, Vol. I, p. 10.

verse and find that they are in meter, though the rule of the Hebrew verse they agree not on. Sufficeth it me only to prove that by the authority of sacred Scriptures both parts of Poesie, invention or imitation and verse are allowable, and consequently that great objection of lying is quite taken away and refuted."¹

The material in support of this argument from scriptural authority is hardly to be exhausted, and these few illustrations may be allowed to represent the extensive use of it. The placing together of poetry and religion was continued in the treatises of the seventeenth century and tended increasingly to produce a higher regard for the poet and a veneration for him as one consecrated. Ben Jonson, influenced, it is said, by Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poesy*,² expresses the high consecration of the poet in a way to foreshadow Milton. He is like Milton in believing that nobility in writing can only come as the expression of nobility in character. In the dedication of Volpone there is this sentence:

"For if men will impartially, and not asquint, look toward the offices and function of a poet, they will easily conclude to themselves the impossibility of any man's being the good poet, without first being a good man."

Again we have in Jonson this eulogy of poetry, expressing the sacredness of poetic aspirations:

"But view her in her glorious ornaments,
Attired in the majesty of art
Set high in spirit with the precious taste
Of sweet philosophy, and what is most

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1. Gregory Smith. *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. II, p. 207.
 2. Spingarn *Critical Essays of the 17th Century*. Introduction, XIII ff.

Crowned with the rich traditions of a soul
 That hates to have her dignity profaned
 With any relish of an earthly thought;
 Oh then how proud a presence does she bear!
 Then is she like herself; fit to be seen
 Of none but grave and consecrated eyes!"

In his Discoveries he says:

"Now the poesy is the habit or the art; nay, rather the queen of arts,-----which had her original from heaven, received thence from the Hebrews, and had in prime estimation with the Greeks, transmitted to the Latins and all nations that professed civility.-----First we require in our poet or maker ----- a goodness of natural wit, ingenium. For whereas all other arts consist of doctrine and precepts, the poet must be able by nature and instinct to pour out the treasure of his mind-----. Then it riseth higher, as by a divine instinct, when it contemns common and known conceptions. It utters somewhat above a mortal mouth. Then it gets aloft and flies away with his rider, whither before it was doubtful to ascend. This the poets understood by their Helicon, Pegasus, or Parnassus-----"1

The idea of inspiration resulting from the close relation of poetry and religion is shown in the following quotation from George Chapman's Preface to Homer:

"For to the glory of God, and the singing of his glories, no man dares deny, man was chiefly made. And what art performs this chief end of man with so much excitation and expression as Poesie,- Moses, David, Solomon, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, chiefly using that to the end above said? And since the excellence of it cannot be obtained by the labor and art of man as all easily confess it, it must needs be acknowledged
 1. Discoveries. Shelling's edition, pp. 74, 75, 76.

a divine infusion.----- So all sciences, therefore, I must still, with our learned and ingenious Spondanus, prefer it, as having a perpetual commerce with the divine majesty, embracing and enjoying continual discourse with his thrice perfect and most comfortable spirit."¹

The dependence upon the Scriptures as authority for poetry tended to displace the pagan authority. More important than the arguments based upon the Greek respect for the poet became the arguments drawn from the close relation of poetry to the Christian religion. It was the religious significance of poetry that upheld it in the seventeenth century.

Milton it is who emphasizes most earnestly the sacred duty of the poet as a spokesman for God. The argument we have just been discussing, that of the poetical character of the Scriptures, is carried forward in the writing of Milton. What he says of it is of great importance to the idea of poetic inspiration. In The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelaty Milton speaks of the poetry of the Bible, citing the "divine pastoral drama in the Song of Solomon", "the Apocalypse of St. John ---- the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy" and goes on to say:

"But those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition, may be easily made appear over all the kinds of lyric poesy to be incomparable. These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most

1. Spingarn - Critical Essays of the 17th Century, p. 67.

abuse) in every nation; and all of power, beside the office
 of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the
 seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations
 of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate
 in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's
 almightiness, and what he works, and what he suffers to be
 wrought with high providence in his church;----- whatever in
 religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable and grave -----
 all these things to point out and describe.-----Whether this may
 not be, not only in pulpits, but after another persuasive
 method, at set and solemn panegaries, in theatres, porches,
 or what other place or way may win most upon the people to
 receive at once both recreation and instruction, let them in
 authority consult. The thing which I had to say and those
 intentions which have lived within me since I could conceive
 myself anything worth to my country, I return to crave excuse
 that urgent reason hath plucked from me, by an abortive and fore-
 dated discovery. And the accomplishment of them lies not but
 in a power above man's to promise;-----Neither do I think it
 shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few
 years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of
 what I am not indebted, as being a work not to be raised from
 the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine; like that which
 flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourest, or the
 trencherfury of a rhyming parasite; nor to be obtained by the
 invocation of dame memory and her siren daughters, but by
 devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all
 utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the

hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases."¹

Such a belief as this gives Milton assurance to say what he does in the beginning of the same treatise:

"And if any man incline to think I undertake a task too difficult for my years, I trust through the supreme enlightening assistance far otherwise; for my years, be they few or many, what imports it?"²

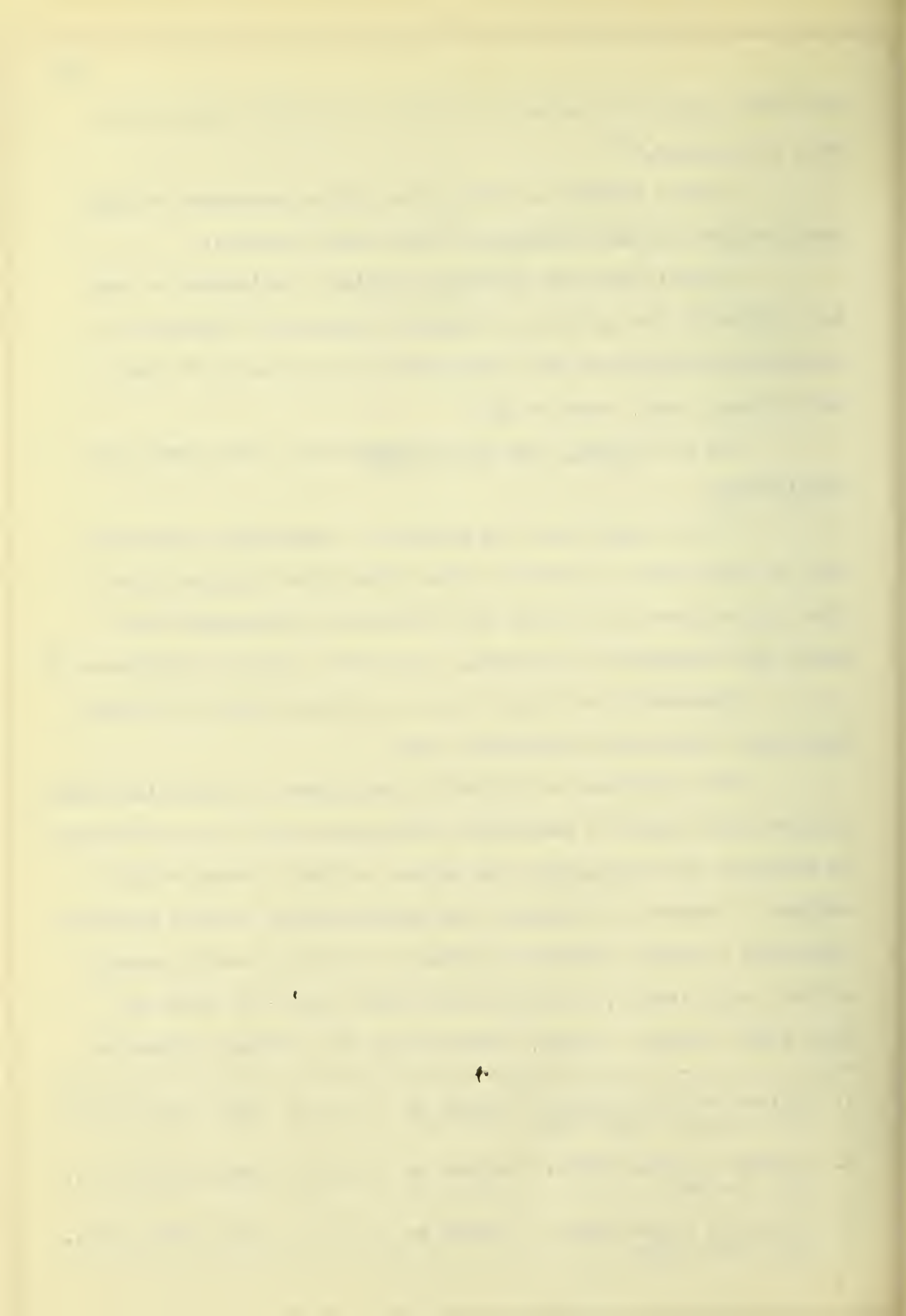
In the Apology for Smectymnaus Milton thus treats of inspiration:

"-----Lest any one should be inquisitive wherefore this or that man is forwarder than others let him know that this office goes not by age or youth, but to whomsoever God shall give apparently the will, the spirit, and the utterance."³

Commenting on this, J. A. St. John, editor of Milton, gives the following interesting note:

"The Puritans of Milton's age appear, in many instances to have laid claim to immediate inspiration; but it is difficult to discover with clearness the nature of their ideas on the subject. Baxter, an eloquent and philosophical writer observes: 'There is a great difference between that light which sheweth us the thing itself, and that artificial skill by which we have right notions, names, definitions, and formed arguments

1. Milton's Prose Works. Edited by J. A. St. John, 1909, Vol. II, pp. 479, 480, 481.
2. Milton's Prose Works. Edited by J. A. St. John, 1909, Vol. II, pp. 441.
3. Milton's Prose Works. Edited by J. A. St. John, 1909, Vol. III, 101, 112.



and answers to objections. This artificial, logical organical kind of knowledge is good and useful in its kind, if right, like speech itself; but he that hath much of this, may have little of the former; and unlearned persons, that have little of this, may have more of the former; and may have those inward perceptions of the verity of the promises and rewards of God, which they cannot bring forth into artificial reasonings to themselves or others; who are taught of God by the effective sort of teaching which reacheth the heart or will, as well as the understanding, and is a giving of what is taught, and a making us such as we are told we must be. And who findeth not need to pray hard for this effective teaching of God when he hath got all organical knowledge; and words and arguments in themselves most apt at his fingers' ends, as we say?" - Dying Thoughts, in Sacred Classics, vol. VI, p. 24, 25 - Ed.

It is also in the Apology for Smectymnuus that Milton voices specifically his belief that nobility in writing can only come from nobility in character. He says:

"So that how he should be truly eloquent who is not withal a good man, I see not."¹

Later he elaborates the expression of this belief as follows:

"And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of

1. Milton's Prose Works. Edited by J. A. St. John, 1909. Vol. III, p. 100.

heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all which is praiseworthy."¹

Milton's belief in inspiration is further expressed in his poetry. In Paradise Lost he invokes the Heavenly Muse, as is usual in the writing of epics, but he goes somewhat beyond the old convention. Though he uses in his invocations much of the imagery of the pagan mythology he is careful to associate his inspiration with the Christian religion. He is unwilling to dispense with the beauty of mythological images but is determined to celebrate Christian ideas. Accordingly, we have the rather strange effect of Christian faiths garbed in pagan thoughts. We have a noticeable instance of this effect in the invocation at the beginning of the seventh book of Paradise Lost.

"Descend from Heaven Urania, by that name
If rightly thou art called, whose voice divine
Following, above the Olympian hill I soar,
Above the flight of Pegasean wing!
The meaning, not the name, I call, for thou
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
Of old Olympus dwellest; but heavenly-born,
Before the hills appeared or fountain flowed,
Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse,
Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst converse,
In presence of the Almighty Father, pleased
With thy celestial song up led by thee
An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
Thy tempering. With like safety quieted down,
Return me to my native element;
Lest from this flying steed unreined (as once
Bellerophon, though from a lower clime)
Dismounted, on the Aleian field I fall,
Erroneous there to wander and forlorn.
Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
Within the visible Diurnal Sphere.
Standing on Earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
To hoarse or mute though fallen on evil days,

1. Milton's Prose Works. Edited by J. A. St. John 1909. Vol. III, pp. 117, 118.

On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,
 In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,
 And solitude, yet not alone while thou
 Visits't my slumbers nightly, or when morn
 Purples the East. Still govern though my song,
 Urania, and fit audience find, though few.
 But drive far off the barbarous dissonance
 Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
 Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
 In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
 To rapture, till the savage clamour drowned
 Both harp and voice; nor could the Muse defend
 Her son. So fail not thou who thee implores;
 For thou art heavenly, she an empty dream."¹

The Muse who inspires Milton is made known to us as
 co-existent with Biblical inspiration:

Sing Heavenly Muse, that, on the secret top
 Of Orel, or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed
 In the beginning how the heavens and earth
 Rose out of Chaos: or, if Sion hill
 Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
 Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues.²
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.²

He often acknowledges the power and guidance of the
 Heavenly Muse, as he does in the Apostrophe to Light:

"Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born

 Thee I revisit now with bolder wing,
 Escaped the Stygian Pool, though long detained
 In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight,
 Through utter and through middle darkness borne,
 With other notes than to the Orphean lyre
 I sing of Chaos and eternal Night,
 Taught by the Heavenly Muse to venture down
 The dark descent and up to re-ascend,
 Though hard and rare."³

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1. Paradise Lost. Bk. VII, ll. 1-40.
 2. Paradise Lost. Bk. I, ll. 6-16.
 3. Paradise Lost. Bk. III, ll. 1-20.

We may take another instance from Paradise Lost of Milton's indebtedness to the Muse:

"If answerable style I can obtain
Of my celestial Patroness, who deigns
Her rightly visitation unimplored
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
Easy my unpremeditated verse.

Unless an age too late, or cold
Climate, or years, damp my intended wing
Depressed; and much they may if all be mine,
Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear."¹

Milton has numerous references, throughout his poetry, to the Muse of his inspiration, usually designated as Heavenly Muse or Celestial Patroness. Though he intends this Muse obviously, to stand for the inspiration of Christianity, he cannot resist throwing about her a glamour drawn from pagan mythology rather than from Christian gospel. This poetical imagery, whatever exception might be taken to it, cannot obscure the great sincerity of Milton's belief in religion as the inspiration of poetry.

To the Puritan belief in immediate inspiration John Bunyan undoubtedly contributed. In Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners he constantly attests to a belief in inspiration. A Divine Voice speaks to him often and with the greatest clearness. A few passages from that work may serve to represent what is often repeated by Bunyan:

"A voice did suddenly dart from Heaven into my soul which said, Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven, or have thy sins and go to Hell? At this I was put into an exceeding Maze-----"²

1. Paradise Lost. Bk. IX. l. 20-47.

2. Grace Abounding 22. Edited by John Brown, 1907, p. 12.



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"One day as I was in a meeting of God's people, full of sadness and terror, for my fears again were strong upon me; and as I was not thinking my soul was never the better but my case most sad and fearful, these words did with great power suddenly break in upon me, My grace is sufficient for thee, My grace is sufficient for thee, My grace is sufficient for thee, three times together. And oh! methought that every word was a mighty word to me."¹

"One day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my Soul, Thy Righteousness is in Heaven; and methought withal, I saw with the Eyes of my Soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand."²

Of further interest is Bunyan's account of his call to the Work of the Ministry, in which he describes himself as the instrument of God. After telling how he was urged to the Exercise of his Gift he says:

"Wherefore, though of myself, of all the Saints the most unworthy, yet I, but with great fear and trembling at the sight of my own weakness, did set upon the work, and did according to my gift, and the proportion of my Faith, Preach that blessed Gospel that God had shewed me in the Holy Word of Truth: Which when the Country understood, they came in to hear the Word by hundreds, and that from all parts, though upon sundry and divers accounts."³

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1. Grace Abounding 207. Edited by John Brown, 1907, p. 64.
 2. Grace Abounding 230. Edited by John Brown, 1907, p. 71.
 3. Grace Abounding 272, 274. Edited by John Brown, 1907, p. 83, 84.

"But I at first could not believe that God should speak by me to the heart of any man, still counting myself unworthy, yet those who were thus touched would love me and have a peculiar respect for me; and though I did put it from me, that they should be awakened by me, still they would confess it and affirm it before the Saints of God; they would also bless God for me (unworthy wretch that I am) and count me God's instrument that shewed to them the way of Salvation."¹

Not to quote further from Bunyan we may conclude with what is possibly his best description of the moving power of Christian inspiration.

"A tinkling Cymbal, is an Instrument of Musick with which a skilful Player can make such melodious and heart inflaming musick, that all who hear him play, can scarcely hold from dancing; and yet behold, the Cymbal hath not Life, neither comes the Musick from it, but because of the Art of him that plays therewith, so then the Instrument at last may come to naught and perish, though in times past such Musick hath been made upon it.

Just thus, I saw, it was and will be with them who have Gifts, but want saving-grace; they are in the hand of Christ, as the Cymbal in the hand of David; and as David could with the Cymbal make that mirth in the Service of God as to elevate the hearts of the Worshippers, so Christ can use these gifted men, as with them to affect the Souls of his People in his Church; yet when he hath done all, hang them by, as lifeless, though sounding Cymbals."²

1. Grace Abounding, 272, 274. Edited by John Brown, 1907, p. 83, 84.

2. Grace Abounding, 299, 300. Edited by John Brown, p. 90.

This idea of the passivity of man as the instrument of God is essentially the same idea that is always comprised in the belief in poetic inspiration. The strong belief in religion as the great inspiration of mankind is emphasized by Bunyan throughout his work though with not such applicability to poetry as we find in Milton.

We have seen how the expressions of the Renaissance return to the idea of inspiration as part of Greek belief became modified in the seventeenth century by Christian doctrine. We have seen how the citing of Greek authority for poetry gave way gradually to the citing of the poetical characteristics of the Bible as authority. The closest union of poetry and religion was brought about by Milton and it was Milton who expressed in greatest eloquence the belief in the divine inspiration of poetry. The critical theory favoring a belief in poetic inspiration began in the defences against the attacks by the Puritans. Yet the belief in its greatest sincerity came later to be expressed by the Puritans themselves.

If the seventeenth century gave rise to eloquent expression of the belief in poetic inspiration it also was a time of general apposition to it and a time when the belief declined. It was in the seventeenth century that the so-called Reign of Rules began. Slavery to rules leaves no place for a belief in poetic inspiration. As W. H. Durham reminds us in his Introduction to Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century, it was not the eighteenth century that saw the beginning either of slavish adherence to rules or of the contempt for emotion. The first had been exemplified notably by Thomas Rymer and the second

by D'Avenant. And, "neither Rymer nor D'Avenant is an isolated phenomenon."¹

Even as early as 1655 Meric Casaubon had striven to combat any latent or evident awe for enthusiasm by his most interesting book entitled A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme, As it is an Effect of Nature: but is mistaken by many for either Divine Inspiration or Diabolical Possession. The following paragraph states his purpose.

"But here I meddle not with policy, but nature; nor with evil men so much as with the evil consequence of the ignorance of natural causes, which both good and evil are subject unto. My business therefore shall be as by examples of all professions in all ages, to shew how men have been very prone upon some grounds of nature, producing some extraordinary though not supernatural effects; really, not hypocritically, but yet falsely and erroneously, to deem themselves divinely inspired: so secondly to dig and dive-----into the deep and dark mysteries of nature, for some reasons, and probable confirmations of such natural aspirations, falsely deemed supernatural."²

Casaubon by no means denies the possibility of divine inspiration, as he insists emphatically, but is sure that the "matter is often mistaken, through grosse ignorance or superstition."³ He is inclined to reserve his belief in inspiration to prophecy and matters purely religious rather than artistic.

1. W. H. Durham Critical Essays of the XVIIIth Century - Introduction XI.

2. Meric Casaubon. A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasm, p. 4.

3. Meric Casaubon. A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasm, p. 184.

During the second half of the seventeenth century the term enthusiasm came to be a term of approbrium rather than of praise. Judgment and painstaking care quite displaced enthusiasm in the graces of writers. The extravagances which had grown out of the Renaissance stood in need of curbing and there came to be a dominating inclination to subject writing to law. Mr. Perry makes the generalization - "It will always be found that a period of great creative fervor is followed by one of careful workmanship"¹ - and after speaking of the fervor of the Renaissance period he says:

"When this first fervor died out, and people turned to books for directions about writing rather than for sympathetic glow, the rules were deemed of the utmost importance, pedants got into power and pseudo-classicism held full sway over the literature and taste of modern Europe. This deliberate wooden imitation of classical models was the, so to speak, the sober second-thought of the Renaissance: the first was one of delight, and it inspired great works in Italy and England; the other followed, correcting, pruning, revising, mistaking pallid faultlessness for perfection, but yet teaching correctness and precision."²

Writing by rule depended upon the writer's close observance of models and upon painstaking, toiling art. Reason and judgment and untiring effort were the qualities most credited. With these, no need nor any desire was felt for inspiration.

1. Perry. English Literature in the 18th Century, p. 13.

2. Perry. English Literature in the 18th Century, p. 241.

CHAPTER III

The Eighteenth Century Return to the Idea of Poetic Inspiration

A. Survivals of the Idea in Conventional Imitations

If we judged only by references to it, we might conclude that the idea of poetic inspiration was by no means being neglected at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Scarcely a poem is without its invocation to the Muse, and there is seldom a poem but makes some reference to its power derived through inspiration. The Muse is given abundant recognition for her singing.

But in the very copiousness of the eighteenth century speeches of homage to the Muse do we detect their insincerity. They have a certain glibness that suggests too plainly their nature as a mere gloss. The idea of poetic inspiration - or we should rather say the reference to what had once been an idea - was in the eighteenth century only a part of that obsession for classical imitation, a part of that pseudo-classicism that was "less Greek than Latin and less Latin than French."

We know very well that the characteristic poets of the eighteenth century did not dispense with reason to breathe in the spirit of poetry. Rather, they carefully collected all their intellectual faculties and set logically to work. Disregardful of souls their poetry was "conceived in their wits."

But they were very careful in keeping the classical proprieties, and classical proprieties prescribed poetic inspiration as necessary for creative accomplishment. It is for this reason that poetic inspiration became a convention. Professor Babbitt touches upon this point very aptly.

"Ancient authorities whom the neo-classicist was bound to respect had declared that poetry has nothing to do with reasoning, but is a sort of divine madness, and so, in an age of formalism, poetic fury itself became a formal requirement - something to turn on judiciously, about as one might turn on a top."¹

Leslie Stephen has spoken also of the conventional treatment of the idea of inspiration.

"The old mythology was regarded as dead, but it was still to be employed ----- . The old spontaneous symbolism thus passed imperceptibly into an arbitrary conventionalism. What passed with ancient poets for divine inspiration was taken to be a process of conscious and deliberate invention."²

Leslie Stephen refers to Pope in this connection as representing the eighteenth century attitude. In fact, Pope is generally to be regarded as the representative of all the characteristics of the Augustan age poetry.³

1. Babbitt. The New Laokoon, p. 21.

2. Leslie Stephen. English Thought in the Eighteenth Century. Vol. II, pp. 355, 356.

3. Leslie Stephen. English Thought in the Eighteenth Century. Vol. II, pp. 349, 350.

John Dennis. The Age of Pope, p. 28.

Mark Pattison in Ward The English Poets, Vol. III, p. 55.

Since Pope may be regarded as representative of his age it will perhaps be just as well to illustrate the eighteenth century conventional treatment of the idea of inspiration by citations from his work alone. There is so little distinction among the other writers in their treatment of this point that it is little profitable to speak of them at any length or individually. Any account we might give here could be, at best, but scantily representative, and the idea is as well illustrated by the work of Pope himself as by examples from many others. After the fashion of the following selections did the early eighteenth century give credit to the idea of poetic inspiration.

"Descend ye Nine! descend and sing;
The breathing instruments inspire,
Wake into voice each silent string,
And sweep the sounding lyre!" -

Ode on St. Cecilia's Day

"Thy forests Windsor! and thy green retreats,
At once the Monarch's and the Muse's seats,
Invite my lays. Be present, sylvan maids!
Unlock your springs, and open all your shades,
Granville commands; your aid, O Muses, bring!
What Muse for Granville can refuse to sing?"

Windsor Forest

"Ye sacred Nine! that all my soul possess,
Whose raptures fire me, and whose visions bless,
Bear me, O bear me to sequester'd scenes,
The bow'ry mazes, and surrounding greens:
To Thames's banks, which fragrant breezes fill,
Or where ye Muses sport on Cooper's Hill."

Windsor Forest

"Ye shades, where sacred truth is sought;
Groves, where immortal sages taught;
Where heavenly visions Plato fir'd
And Epicurus lay inspir'd!"

Chorus of Athenians

To the Tragedy of Brutus

"Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inspire,
And bless their Critic with a Poet's fire.
An ardent Judge, who zealous in his trust

With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just;
 Whose own example strengthens all his laws;
 And is himself that great Sublime he draws.

Essay on Criticism. ll.675-680.

"Hail, Bards triumphant! born in happier days;
 Immortal heirs of universal praise!"

 Oh may some spark of your celestial fire,
 The last, the meanest of your sons inspire,
 That on weak wings, from far, pursues your flights;
 Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes.'

Essay on Criticism ll.189-198

The Essay on Criticism is full of references to the Muses, to Pegasus, the bays, the lyre, and such symbols of inspiration. It is full too of the eighteenth century emphasis upon conscious art and judgment. Illustrative of this emphasis is the following:

'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's steed;
 Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed;
 The winged courser, like a generous horse,
 Shows most true mettle when you check his course.
 ll. 84-89

Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites.
 When to repress, and when indulge our flights.
 High on Parnassus' top her sons she show'd,
 And pointed out those arduous paths they trod;
 Held from afar, aloft, th' immortal prize,
 And urg'd the rest by equal steps to rise.
 Just precepts thus from great examples giv'n,
 She drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n.
 ll.92-99

 Be Homer's works your study and delight,
 Read them by day, and meditate by night;
 Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,
 And trace the Muses upward to their spring.
 Still with itself compar'd his text peruse;
 And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.
 ll. 124-129

Though they might speak copiously of poetic rages the poets of the eighteenth century took care that their work should be done in cool reason. The warp and the woof of their fabric must be reason and judgment and only the embroidery poetic

fervor. In most cases the poetic fervor was rather applique than embroidery even. Apropos of this is Leslie Stephen's remark - "The poet, unable to use the vivid language of downright passion, lest the poor ghosts of old superstitions should be shrivelled into nothingness, was forced to distinguish his work from prose by the adoption of conventional phrases."¹

The eighteenth century, holding correctness as its ideal, insisted upon obedience to law and upon faithfulness to the rules of classicism. Control was much more to be desired than exuberance and judgment was more admired than enthusiasm. John Dennis in his Age of Pope thus characterizes the age:

"Speaking broadly ---- the literary merits of the Queen Anne time are due to invention, fancy, wit, to a genius for satire exhibited in verse and prose, to a regard for correctness of form and to the sensitive avoidance of extremes. The poets of the period are for passion, and without the 'fine madness' which, as Drayton says, should possess a poet's brain. Wit takes precedence of imagination, nature is concealed by artifice, and the delight afforded by these writers is not due to imaginative sensibility."²

Of the subjection of the imagination Leslie Stephen says:

"The imagination was to work within the limits prescribed for it by the cool and impartial reason. Superstition and enthusiasm - the dreaded diseases in the religious world - were equally abhorrent in the sphere of poetry. The poet was never

1. Leslie Stephen. English Thought in the 18th Century, Vol. II, p. 357.

2. John Dennis. The Age of Pope, p. 3.

to throw the reins upon the neck of his passion, or to abandon himself to a fine frenzy in defiance of mechanical laws." ¹

When the poetical reform of which Pope is the outstanding figure had reached a certain authority of suppression it was natural that there should be a reaction. A theory of poetry maintaining that all must be done by rule could not long be very congenial to poetic nature. After the refinement of poetry had progressed so far that the process was no longer interesting, a desire was felt for a new emphasis. From the beginning of the century there were undercurrents which tended to turn the stream in a different direction than that in which it was supposedly going. The very faithfulness with which the rules were observed in the early eighteenth century, made the necessity of a later revolt from them. The narrowing down of all poetic expression into prescribed bounds left a fund of repressed emotion which must sometime seek an outlet. The poetry of correctness excited admiration but it failed to satisfy. Even though there might be approval of all that such poetry gave, there was also a craving for what it did not give. As Leslie Stephen remarks "the poets of the eighteenth century ---- show a disposition to edge away from the types which they professed to admire."² A fuller and more satisfying expression could only come through revolt against restraint and limitation.

It is on the revolt against rules, in the pushing back of neo-classicism by the rising romanticism that we are to trace the strengthening of the idea of poetic inspiration.

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1. Leslie Stephen. English Thought in the 18th Century, pp. 354, 355.
 2. Leslie Stephen. English Thought in the 18th Century. Vol.II, p. 359.

The most comprehensive term we can use to characterize poetic inspiration as it is a part of romanticism is "enthusiasm." In "enthusiasm" are included such salient qualities of romanticism and inspiration as impassioned emotion, exaltation of nature over art, freedom of imagination, and desire for the wonderful or supernatural. This list of qualities is neither exhaustive nor sharply differentiating. The nature of our subject precludes any great degree of definiteness, however, and this list indicates the main tendencies of the work we shall examine.

B. The Growth of a New Belief in Poetic Inspiration in Correlation with Romanticism as Shown in the work of Eighteenth Century Writers.

John Dennis

In noting the reappearance in critical theory of the idea of poetic inspiration we must take account of John Dennis. Although his critical writing belongs in part to the seventeenth century, yet the essays that we are concerned with in this question were written in the early part of the eighteenth century. More than anyone else Dennis carried on Milton's convictions in regard to inspiration of poetry.

Dennis' contribution to the eighteenth century belief in poetic inspiration was his insistence on religious enthusiasm as the necessary foundations for good poetry. In speaking of poetic inspiration he associates it inextricably with religion, thus reiterating Milton's belief. Dennis' conviction on this

subject is specifically stated in his essay on Modern Poetry, which was published in 1701. The general contention of this work is indicated by its full title - "The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry. A Critical Discourse in Two Parts. The First, Shewing that the Principal Reason why the Ancients excel'd the Moderns in the Greater Poetry, was because they mix'd Religion with Poetry. The Second, Proving that by joyning Poetry with the Religion reveal'd to us in Sacred Writ, the Modern Poets might come to equal the Ancient."

We may quote parts of the argument that Dennis uses to prove that any superiority the Ancients may have had came from their choice of religious subjects.

"Now all the internal advantages, which the Ancients may be supposed to have had over the Moderns, may be reduced to four, Divine Inspiration, Inspiration by Daemons, A Natural Superiority of the Faculties of the Soul, A Greater Degree of Virtue.

"The first advantage that the Ancient Poets may be supposed to have had over the Moderns, is from Divine Inspiration. Now the Ancient Poets were the Heathen Theologues, and to affirm that the Spirit of God should inspire those to teach the Adoration of Idols, and inspire them more than he does the Moderns, who are of the true Religion, would be equally absurd and blasphemous.

"Nor, secondly, can they have any advantage by Inspiration of Daemons. ----- Supposing the Ancient graecian

Poets were really inspired by Daemons, it is hard to imagine that they should receive a greater advantage from such an inspiration as that, than the Moderns, who apply themselves to Sacred Poetry, should have from Divine Assistance.

"Nor, thirdly, can the Ancient Poets be supposed to have had a greater share of virtue than the Moderns. ----- Now it is hard to imagine, that they who had no system of morality, and no supernatural support, should transcend the Moderns in Vertue, who have a perfect system of Morality and Divine Assistance.

"Nor, fourthly, ---- had the Ancient any natural superiority of Faculties over the Modern Poets. -----

"The advantage then, which the Ancient Poets had over the Moderns, if they had any advantage, must be derived from the Subjects of which they treated."-----¹

Dennis' arguments are exceedingly diffuse and variously repeated, but from among them the following selections may indicate their direction.

"Passion is the characteristical mark of Poetry.---² There must be passion then, that must be distinct from ordinary Passion, and that must be Enthusiasm. I call that ordinary Passion, whose cause is clearly comprehended by him who feels it, whether it be Admiration, Terror, or Joy; and I call the very same Passions Enthusiasms, when their cause is not clearly

1. Dennis. Of Modern Poetry, pp. 14-20.

2. Ibid, pp. 25-27.

comprehended by him who feels them. ----- Now everything that they call Spirit or Genius in Poetry, in short, everything that pleases, and consequently moves in the Poetick Diction, is Passion, whether it be ordinary or enthusiastick."¹

"Now no Subject is so capable of supplying us with Thoughts, that necessarily produce their great and strong enthusiasms, as a Religious Subject; For all which is great in Religion is most exalted and amazing, all that is joyful is transporting, all that is sad is dismal, and all that is terrible is astonishing." -----²

"And thus we have endeavoured to shew how the enthusiasm proceeds from the thoughts, and consequently from the subject. But one thing we have omitted, that as thoughts produce the spirit, the spirit produces and makes the expression; which is known by experience to all who are Poets; for never anyone, while he was wrapt with Enthusiasm, wanted either words or harmony; ----- Poetical genius in a Poem is the true expression of Ordinary or Enthusiastic Passion proceeding from Ideas, to which it naturally belongs."³

"Everything that is great in Poetry must be great by the Genius that is felt in it. -----"⁴

"Religious Enthusiasm must necessarily be greater than Human Enthusiasm can be, because the Passions that attend on

1. Dennis, Of Modern Poetry, pp. 25-27.

2. Ibid, p. 33.

3. Ibid, p. 45, 46.

4. Ibid, p. 66.

Religious Ideas, when a man is capable of Reflecting on them as he should do, are stronger than those which attend on Prophane Ideas. ---"¹

The Graecian Religion flourished in Greece from the time of Orpheus ----- till the Age after that in which Sophocles flourished, that is, for the space of about eight hundred years, and in that space of time flourished all their Poets, who are celebrated for their excellence in that sort of Poetry which we call Sacred. Which alone is a strong presumption that these Poets deriv'd their excellence from Religion.-----"²

"Poetry seems to be a noble attempt of Nature, by which it endeavors to exalt itself to its happy primitive state; and he who is entertained with an accomplished poem, is for a time at least restor'd to Paradise. That happy man converses boldly with Immortal Beings. Transported he beholds the Gods ascending and descending, and every Passion in its turn is charm'd, while that his Reason is supremely satisfied.-----"³

"But now since the design of Poetry, and the very method of prosecuting that design, as far as it can be humanly prosecuted, is the same with that of the true Religion, since the very thing that they both propose is to exalt the Reason by exalting the Passions, and so make happy the whole man by making Internal Discord cease. I appeal to anyone whether Poetry must not agree better with that Religion, whose Designs are the very

1. Dennis, Of Modern Poetry, p. 70.

2. Ibid, p. 82.

3. Ibid, p. 172.

same with it, than with Paganism or Philosophy or Deism.---"1

"The Christian Religion alone can supply a Poet with all that is Sublime and Majestick in Reason; all that is either soft or powerful, either engaging or Imperious in the Passions; and with all the objects that are most admirable to the senses, and consequently most delightful.---"2

"For, as our Religion gives us more exalted notions of the power of an Infinite Being, than the Heathen Religion did to the Graecian and Roman Poets; it consequently produces a stronger spirit in Poetry, when it is managed by those who have souls that are capable of expressing it."3

"When I say that Milton excels Virgil, I mean that he does so sometimes both in his Thought and in his Spirit, purely by the advantage of his Religion.-----And tis plain that Milton owes this greatness and this elevation to the Excellence of his Religion."4

"And thus I have endeavour'd to show in the former part of this Book, that the principal reason why the Ancient Poets excell'd the Moderns in the greatness of Poetry was because they incorporated Poetry with Religion; and in the second Part, that the Moderns, by joyning the Christian Religion with Poetry will have the advantage of the Ancients; that is that they will have the assistance of a Religion that is more agreeable to the design of Poetry than the Grecian Religion."5

1. Dennis, Of Modern Poetry, pp. 173, 174.

2. Ibid, p. 177.

3. Ibid, p. 190.

4. Ibid, pp. 204, 207.

5. Ibid, p. 216.

All the points made in this treatise are reiterated in The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry published in 1704. In the nature of a summary is the following passage.

"I could add an infinite number of Examples, if it were not altogether needless; for what has been said may suffice to show that a Poet who intends to give that Elevation and that gravity to his Poem which compose Majesty, can fetch his Ideas from no Object so proper as from God. For as great Elevation must be produced by a great Admiration, as every Passion which the Poet excites, ought to be just and reasonable, and adapted to its Object, it is impossible that anyone, who is not stupid, can seriously contemplate his Maker, but that his Soul must be exalted and lifted up towards its Primitive Objects, and be fill'd and inspired with the highest admiration. For 'tis then that the Enthusiasm in Poetry is wonderful and Divine, when it shows the Excellence of the Author's discernment, and the largeness of his Soul; now all the Ideas of God are such, that the more large and comprehensive the Soul of a Poet is, and the more it is capable of Receiving those Ideas, the more is it sure to be raised and fill'd and lifted to the Skies with wonder. The Spirit or the Passion in Poetry ought to be proportional to the Ideas, and the Ideas to the Object, and when it is not so it is utterly false.----- But nothing but God, and what relates to God, is worthy to move the soul of a great and wise man.---"etc.¹

In The Grounds of Criticism Dennis repeats many times

1. The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, p. 37.

and often in the same words the ideas he emphasized first in the treatise Of Modern Poetry. We need quote only some of the comparatively concise statements from The Grounds of Criticism in addition to the paragraph just cited.

"Poetry is the natural Language of Religion, and Religion at first produced it as a Cause produces its Effect."¹

"Now the less mixture Religion has of anything of Human Invention in it, the more Divine it is and the nearer it brings us to God."²

"It is ridiculous to imagine that there can be a more proper way to express some parts and duties of a Religion which we believe to be Divinely Inspired, than the very way in which they were at first delivered. Now the most important part of the Old Testament was delivered not only in a Poetical style but in Poetical Numbers. The most Important parts of the Old Testament to us are the Prophecies.----- For the Prophets were Poets by the Institution of their Order and Poetry was one of the Prophetick Functions."³

Dennis finally concludes the treatise with the following:

"And thus much may suffice to shew the Nature of Poetry, but chiefly of the greater Poetry, and the Importance of this Design. For since Poetry has been thought not only by Heathens, but by the Writers of the Old Testament, and consequently by

1. The Grounds of Criticism, p. 97.

2. Ibid, p. 104.

3. Ibid, p. 118.

God Himself who inspir'd them, to be the fittest method for the enforcing Religion upon the Minds of Men, and since Religion is the only solid Foundation of all Civil Society, it follows that whoever Endeavors to Re-establish Poetry, makes a generous attempt to restore an Art, that may be highly Advantageous to the Publick, and Beneficial to Mankind."¹

From these selections we find that Dennis' most significant contribution to the idea of poetic inspiration is his insistence on passion as a necessary factor of poetry. In place of the emphasis upon polish and elegance which is characteristic of his age, Dennis here gives us the emphasis upon enthusiasm. By enthusiasm we find he means "everything that they call Spirit or Genius in Poetry." Though we are attracted by his affirmation that "nothing but God, and what relates to God, is worthy to move the soul of a great and wise man," perhaps the most memorable sentence Dennis has given us concerning inspiration is the following one from a passage we have quoted at length: "The spirit produces and makes the expression; --- for never anyone while he was wrapt with Enthusiasm wanted either words or harmony."

The Third Earl of Shaftesbury

Lord Shaftesbury, in his Characteristics, has many references to poetic inspiration. His treatment of the subject is often facetious, as may be shown by the following selections from A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm.

1. The Grounds of Criticism. p. 126

"It has been an established custom for Poets, at the entrance of their work, to address themselves to some Muse, and this practise of the Ancients has gained so much Repute, that even in our days we find it almost constantly imitated.----- Now what possibility is there that a Modern who is known never to have worshipped Apollo, or owned any such Deity as the Muses, should persuade us to enter into his pretended Devotion, and move us by his feigned Zeal in a Religion out of date? But as for the Ancients, 'tis known they derived both their Religion and Polity from the Muses' Art. ----- The Goddesses had their Temples and Worship, the same as other Deitys; And to disbelieve the Holy Nine, or their Apollo, was the same as to deny Jove himself; and must have been esteemed equally profane and atheistical by the generality of sober men. Now what a mighty advantage must it have been to an Ancient Poet to be thus Orthodox and by the help of his Education and a Good-Will into the Bargain, to work himself up to the Belief of a Divine Presence and Heavenly Inspiration? It was never surely the business of Poets in those days to call Revelation in question, when it evidently made so well for their art. On the contrary, they could not fail to animate their Faith as much as possible; when by a single Act of it, well inforced, they could raise themselves into such angelical Company."¹

After a discussion concerning the "Distemper of Enthusiasm" among the ancients, he says further:

1. Shaftesbury, Characteristics, 1732 Edition, pp. 4-7.

"No Poet (as I ventured to say at first to your Lordship) can do anything great in his own way, without the Imagination or Supposition of a Divine Presence, which may raise him to some degree of this Passion we are speaking of. -----¹

"The only thing, my Lord, I would infer from all this, is that Enthusiasm is wonderfully powerful and extensive; that it is a matter of nice judgment and the hardest thing in the world to know fully and distinctly; since even Atheism is not exempt from it. For as some have remarked, there have been Enthusiastical Atheists. Nor can Divine Inspiration, by its outward Marks, be easily distinguished from it. For Inspiration is a real feeling of the Divine Presence and Enthusiasm a false one."¹

Very interesting is the following discussion in which the idea of inspiration is treated more sympathetically. It anticipates strikingly the later eighteenth century romantic longing for vastness and sublimity.

"Something there will be of Extravagance and Fury, when the Ideas or Images received are too big for the narrow human Vessel to contain. So that Inspiration may be justly called Divine Enthusiasm: For the Word itself signifies Divine Presence, and was made use of by the Philosopher whom the earliest Christian fathers called Divine, to express whatever was sublime in human Passions. This was the Spirit he allotted to

1. Characteristics, Vol. I, pp. 51-54.

Heroes, Statesmen, Poets, Orators, Musicians, and even Philosophers themselves. Nor can we, of our own accord, forbear ascribing to a noble Enthusiasm, whatever is greatly performed by any of these."¹

After the rather superficial treatment of inspiration in the Letter on Enthusiasm, Shaftesbury returns to the subject to do justice to it in Miscellany II. As a beginning, he thus states his position:

"Whether, in fact, there be any real Enchantment, any Influence of Stars, any Power of Daemons or of foreign Natures over our own Minds, is thought questionable by many. Some there are who assert the Negative and endeavor to solve the Appearances of this kind by the natural Operation of our Passions, and the common course of outward things. For my own part, I cannot but at this present apprehend a kind of Enchantment or Magick in that which we call Enthusiasm; since I find, that having touched slightly on this Subject, I cannot so easily part with it at pleasure."²

This Miscellany is, in general, an elaborate discussion of the previous Letter on Enthusiasm with an attempt to make credible the ideas formerly regarded with scepticism. He refers to the union of poetry and religion and to the inspiration of prophecy. There are various digressions and no very quotable passages.

1. Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 54.

2. Ibid, Vol. III, p. 28.

In the treatise called Advice to an Author, Shaftesbury compares the actuality with the ideal of poetry:

"I must confess there is hardly anywhere to be found a more insipid Race of Mortals, than those whom we Moderns are contented to call Poets, for having attained the chiming faculty of a Language with an injudicious random use of Wit and Fancy. But for the Man, who truly and in a just sense deserves the name of Poet, and who as a real Master, or Architect in the Kind, can describe both Men and Manners, and give to an action its just Body and Proportions, he will be found, if I mistake not, a very different Creature. Such a Poet is indeed a second Maker; a just Prometheus, under Jove. ----- The moral Artist, who can thus imitate the Creator, and is thus knowing in the inward Form and Structure of his Fellow Creature, will hardly, I presume, be found unknowing in Himself, or at a loss in those Numbers which make the Harmony of a Mind. For Knavery is mere Dissonance and Disproportion. And tho Villains may have strong Tones and natural Capacity of Action, 'tis impossible that true Judgment and Ingenuity should reside, where Harmony and Honesty have no being.¹"

In support of this last point, Shaftesbury refers to the characters of the greatest poets, and gives a long quotation from the poet Strabo, which concludes: "Insomuch that 'tis impossible he should be a great and worthy Poet, who is not first a worthy and good man."¹ In his fondness for this point, we find Shaftesbury allied with Ben Jonson and with Milton.

1. Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 207, 208.

In this same treatise, Shaftesbury reveals a veneration for Scriptural inspiration and warns poets against a presumptuous imitation of sacred things:

"It may here perhaps be thought that notwithstanding the particular advice which we have given, in relation to the forming of a Taste in natural Characters and Manners; we are still defective in our Performance, whilst we are silent on supernatural cases, and bring not into our Consideration the manners and Characters delivered us in Holy Writ. But this Objection will soon vanish, when we consider that there can be no rules given by human Wit to that which was never humanly conceived, but divinely dictated and inspired. -----

"'Tis apparent therefore that the Manners, Actions, and Characters of Sacred Writ, are in no wise the proper Subject of other Authors than Divines themselves. They are Matters incomprehensible in Philosophy. They are above the pitch of the mere human Historian, the Politician, or the Moralist; and are too sacred to be submitted to the Poet's Fancy, when inspired by no other Spirit than that of his profane Mistresses, the Muses."¹

Miscellany V is, in substance, a continuation of the treatise on Advice to an Author, and takes up again the question of inspiration. Occasion is taken to rebuke those poets who pretend to inspiration in order to excuse negligence.

"They pretend to set themselves above mankind. 'Their Pens are Sacred.' 'Their Style and Utterance divine.' They write

1. Characteristics, Vol. I, pp. 355-358.

often as in a Language foreign to human Kind; and would disdain to be reminded of those poor Elements of Speech, their Alphabet and Grammar.

"But here inferior mortals presume often to intercept their Flight, and remind them of their fallible and human part. Had those first poets who began this Pretence to Inspiration, been taught a manner of communicating their rapturous Thoughts and high Ideas by some other medium than that of Style and Language, the Case might have stood otherwise. But inspiring Divinity or Muse having, in the Explanation of Herself, submitted her Wit and Sense to the mechanick Rules of human arbitrary Composition; she must, in consequence and by necessity, submit herself to human arbitration, and the Judgment of the literate World."¹

Shaftesbury continues this discussion making it very plain that he believes inspiration should work through the medium of judgment, "unless a Language and Grammar, different from any of human Structure, were delivered down from Heaven, and miraculously accommodated to human Service and Capacity."¹

He believes that to be worthy of inspiration an author must perfect painstakingly the medium for expressing it. "It being a mere contradiction to all Divine and Moral Truth, that a Celestial Hand, submitting itself to the Rudiments of a human Art, should sin against the Art itself, and express Falsehood and error instead of Justness and Proportion."² Later he complains

1. Vol. III, p. 229.

2. Ibid, p. 230.

that "An English Author would be all Genius. He would reap the Fruits of Art; but without Study, Pains or Application."¹

"Study, Pains, and Application" are by no means to be merely imitative, however. We could not study Shaftesbury for his views on inspiration if he believed that. He gives earnest expression to the ever ascending love for originality. It is this love for the original as expressed by various writers, in opposition to the neo-classical imitation that does more than anything, perhaps, to further the new belief in poetic inspiration. Of the original, as distinguished from the imitative, Shaftesbury says: "They are mean Spirits who love to copy merely. Nothing is agreeable or natural, but what is original. Our Manners like our Faces, though ever so beautiful, must differ in their Beauty. An over regularity is next to a Deformity."²

A very considerable part of the revolt against neo-classicism was the exaltation of original genius over regularity and conformity. Writing according to personality was to take the place, after a series of cumulative tendencies, of writing by rule. The emphasis was gradually lifted from the attainment of perfection by following definitely formulated rules, and was placed upon that mysterious and unexplainable quality, original genius. This emphasis had in it both romantic vagueness and romantic abandon. Genius need not be circumscribed and might reach out into that vastness which was so longed for by the romantic aspiration. The indefiniteness of the source of genius

1. Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 258.

2. Ibid, p. 262.

gave that feeling of wonder and supernaturalism most attractive to romanticism. From this feeling was to be developed the belief in divine inspiration.

Joseph Addison

The romantic exaltation of genius over learning was given a notable impetus by Addison. Though we generally think of Addison as a classicist, some of his Spectator papers show a considerable deviation from the straight and narrow path of classicism. Most important as furthering the belief in poetic inspiration is his paper concerning great natural geniuses. In this paper¹ Addison does not specifically name poetic inspiration, but very effectually belittles art and learning in favor of that great enthusiastic quality, natural genius. He gives it as his design to consider what is properly a great genius and thus proceeds:

"Among great geniuses those few draw the admiration of all the world upon them, and stand up as the prodigies of mankind, who, by the mere strength of natural parts, and without any assistance of art or learning, have produced works that were the delight of their own times and the wonder of posterity. There appears something nobly wild and extravagant in these great natural geniuses that is infinitely more beautiful than all turn and polishing of what the French call a bel esprit, by which they would express a genius refined by conversation, reflection, and the reading of the most polite authors. -----

"Many of these great natural geniuses that were never

1. Spectator, Number 160, Sept. 3, 1711.

disciplined and broken by rules of art, are to be found among the ancients, and in particular among those of the more eastern parts of the world. Homer has innumerable flights that Virgil was not able to reach; and in the Old Testament we find several passages more elevated and sublime than any in Homer.----- Our countryman Shakespeare was a remarkable instance of this first kind of great geniuses.

"I cannot quit this head without observing that Pindar was a great genius of the first class, who was hurried on by a natural fire and impetuosity to vast conceptions of things and noble sallies of imagination. ----- When I see people copying works, which, as Horace has represented them, are singular in their kind and inimitable; when I see men following irregularities by rule, and by the little tricks of art straining after the most unbounded flights of nature; I cannot but apply to them that passage in Terence: 'You may as well pretend to be mad and in your senses at the same time, as to think of reducing these uncertain things to any certainty by reason.' In short, a modern Pindaric writer, compared with Pindar, is like a sister among the Camisars compared with Virgil's Sibyl: there is the distortion, grimace, and outward figure, but nothing of that divine impulse which raises the mind above itself, and makes the sounds more than human.

----- "The second class of great geniuses are those that have formed themselves by rules, and submitted the greatness of their natural talents to the corrections and restraints of art.

"The genius in both these classes of authors may be equally great, but shows itself after a different manner. In the first, it is like a rich soil in a happy climate, that produces a whole wilderness of noble plants rising in a thousand beautiful landscapes without any certain order or regularity; In the other, it is the same rich soil under the same happy climate, that has been laid out in walks and parterres, and cut into shape and beauty by the skill of the gardener.

"The great danger in these latter kind of geniuses, is, lest they cramp their own abilities too much by imitation and form themselves altogether upon models, without giving the full play to their own natural parts."-----

Addison's Papers on Imagination¹ are interesting as revealing those tendencies of Romanticism that are most conducive to a belief in poetic inspiration. They exalt especially the qualities of strangeness, vastness, and infinity, and proclaim the superiority of uncontrolled nature above art. A very few quotations may show the tendency of this series of discussions:

"Our imagination loves to be filled with an object or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing astonishment at such unbounded views, and feel a delightful stillness and amazement in the soul at the apprehension of them."²

1. Spectator papers, 411-421, 1712.

2. Ibid, No. 412.

"Our admiration ----- will improve into the highest pitch of astonishment and devotion when we contemplate His nature, that is neither circumscribed by time nor place, nor to be comprehended by the largest capacity of a created being."¹

"If we consider works of nature and art as they are qualified to entertain the imagination, we shall find the last very defective in comparison of the former; for though they may sometimes appear as beautiful or strange, they can have nothing in them of that vastness and immensity which afford so great an entertainment to the mind of the beholder. ----- There is something more bold and masterly in the rough careless strokes of nature than in the nice touches and embellishments of art."²

By such passages as these, Addison undoubtedly gave a great impetus to the idea of poetic inspiration as distinguished from poetic art.

James Thomson

James Thomson is of foremost interest as one of the early eighteenth century writers expressing a belief in poetic inspiration. We find in Thomson an enthusiasm for poetry not common in his time. Some idea of his attitude toward poetry may be gained from the Preface included in the second, third, and fourth editions of *Winter*.³ His high estimation of the

1. Spectator papers, No. 413.

2.

3. Edition of Thomson's Works by D. C. Tovey, p. CXI

nature of poetry is shown in the first part of the Preface:

"I am neither ignorant, nor concerned, how much one may suffer in the opinion of several persons of great gravity and character, by the study and pursuit of poetry.

"Although there may seem to be some appearance of reason for the present contempt of it as managed by the most part of our modern writers, yet that any man should seriously, declare against that divine art is, really, amazing. It is declaring against the most charming power of imagination, the most exalting force of thought, the most affecting touch of sentiment; in a word, against the very soul of all learning, and politeness. It is affronting the universal taste of mankind, and declaring atainst what has charmed the listening world from Moses down to Milton. In fine, it is, even, declaring against the sublimest passages of the inspired writings themselves, and what seems to be the peculiar language of Heaven."¹

Thomson admits the notorious abuses of poetry, but insists, as the Elizabethan defenders had done, that it is not right to draw an argument against the use of poetry from the abuse of it. He goes on to suggest the possible re-exaltation of poetry:

"To insist no further on this head, let poetry, once more, be restored to her ancient truth and purity; let her be inspired from heaven, and in return, her incense ascend thither; let her exchange her low, venal, trifling subjects for such as

1. Edition of Thomson's Works by D. C. Tovey, p. CXI.

are fair, useful, and magnificent; and, let her execute these so as, at once, to please, instruct, surprise, and astonish; and then, of necessity, the most inveterate ignorance, and prejudice, shall be struck dumb; and poets, yet become the delight and wonder of mankind."

Thomson, in a measure, subscribes to Dennis' theory for the improvement of poetry by the choice of exalted subjects:

"Nothing can have a better influence towards the revival of poetry than the choosing of great and serious subjects; such as, at once, amuse the fancy, enlighten the head, and warm the heart. These give a weight and dignity to the poem; nor is the pleasure, I should say, rapture, both the writer and the reader feels, unwarranted by reason, or followed by repentant disgust. ----- A genius fired with the charms of truth, and nature, is tuned to a sublimer pitch, and scorns to associate with such subjects."

We see his difference from Dennis, however, when Thomson declares the visible works of Nature to be the greatest subjects for Poetry:

"I know no subject more elevating, more amusing; more ready to awake the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment than the works of Nature. Where can we meet with such variety, such beauty, such magnificence? All that enlarges, and transports, the soul? What more inspiring than a calm, wide, survey of them? In every dress nature is greatly charming! ----- But there is no thinking of these things without breaking out into Poetry; which is, by-the-bye, a

plain and undeniable argument of their superior excellence."

From this beginning, Thomson develops arguments for one of the primary tendencies of romanticism - the return to wild uncivilized nature, untouched by the art of man. We have in this preface an indication of that Deism that appears so prominently in the Seasons, and which is of particular interest to us in this study.

Thomson's idea of the inspiration of poetry is part of his belief in God as manifested in outward Nature. From the Seasons we may select passages illustrative of this Deistic belief as it is connected with the idea of poetic inspiration.

Winter, though it contains various references to inspiration, is not so valuable in this connection as the later three divisions of The Seasons. Lines following 530 of Winter describe elaborately a vision of Phoebus, Virgil, Homer, and Milton, and thus invoke such spirits as theirs:

"First of your kind !society divine !
Still visit thus my nights, for you reserved,
And mount my soaring soul to thoughts like yours."

Summer begins with this invocation:

"Come, inspiration !from thy hermit seat,
By mortal seldom found: may fancy dare,
From thy fixed serious eye, and raptured glance
Shot on surrounding heaven, to steal one look
Creative of the poet, every power
Exalting to an ecstasy of soul."

More characteristic of Thomson than these invocations are such passages as the following, expressive of his Deistic tendency:

"And yet was every faltering tongue of man,
Almighty Father ! silent in thy praise,
Thy works themselves would raise a general voice;

To me be Nature's volume broad displayed;
And to peruse its all-instructing page,
Or, haply catching inspiration thence,
Some easy passage, raptured, to translate,
My sole delight, as through the falling glooms
Pensive I stray, or with the rising dawn,
On Fancy's eagle-wing excursive soar."¹

After a description of the forest, he tells us:

"These are the haunts of meditation, these
The scenes where ancient bards the inspiring breath,
Ecstatic felt; and, from this world retired,
Conversed with angels and immortal forms.---"²

The passages following this are interesting as expressive of the idea of inspiration through God in Nature. They are too long to quote entire, but the following may be indicative:

"Deep-roused, I feel
A sacred terror, a severe delight,
Creep through my mortal frame; and thus, methinks
A voice, than human more, the abstracted ear
Of fancy strikes.----
Here frequent at the visionary hour,
When musing midnight reigns, or silent noon,
Angelic harps are in full concert heard,
And voices chanting from the wood crowned hill,
The deepening dale, or inmost sylvan glade,
A privilege bestowed by us alone,

1. Thomson, Summer, ll. 185-198.

2. Ibid, ll. 522-525.

On contemplation, or the hallowed ear
Of poet, swelling to seraphic strain.

Thus up the mount, in airy vision rapt,
I stray regardless whither.-----"

The invocation in Spring takes this form:

"Hail, Source of Beings ! Universal Soul
Of heaven and earth ! Essential Presence, hail !
To Thee I bend the knee; to Thee my thoughts,
Continual climb, who, with a master hand,
Hast the great whole into perfection touched."

Of the power of Nature to arouse enthusiasm he speaks
in the following:

"-----Pure serenity apace
Induces thought, and contemplation still.
By swift degrees the love of nature works
And warms the bosom; till at last, sublimed
To rapture and enthusiastic heat,
We feel the present Deity, and taste
The joy of God to see a happy world !" ¹

In Autumn we have further illustration of Thomson's
conception of Nature:

"----Here wandering oft, fired with the restless thirst
Of thy applause, I solitary court
The inspiring breeze; and meditate the book
Of Nature, ever open; aiming thence,
Warm from the heart, to learn the moral song." ²

Thomson gives us an interesting description of the

1. Spring, ll. 897-903.

2. Autumn, ll. 668-672.

power of "Philosophic Melancholy" induced by the contemplation of Nature in autumn:

"O'er all the soul his sacred influence breathes;
Inflames imagination; through the breast
Infuses every tenderness, and far
Beyond dim earth exalts the swelling thought.
Ten thousand thousand fleet ideas, such
As never mingled with the vulgar dream,
Crowd fast into the mind's creative eye.
As fast the correspondent passions rise,
As varied and as high: devotion raised
To rapture, and divine astonishment.
The love of nature, unconfined, and chief,
Of human race." ¹

We might quote many passages to show that it is to Nature in the Deistic conception of Nature that Thomson looks for poetic inspiration. In this sense, divine inspiration is brought to man through the medium of visible Nature. As a last quotation from Thomson, we may take the following:

"Oh ! bear me then to vast embowered vales;
To weeping grottoes, and prophetic glooms,
Where angel forms athwart the solemn dusk,
Tremendous, sweep, or seem to sweep along,
And voices, more than human, through the void ²
Deep sounding, seize the enthusiastic ear."

The Wartons

In a correlation of the idea of poetic inspiration with romanticism, we must not fail to consider the work of Joseph and Thomas Warton, both notable figures in encouraging

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1. Autumn, ll. 1010-1021.
 2. Ibid, ll. 1030-1036.

the new romantic tendencies in literature.

Without discussing their place in romanticism, which is adequately established, we shall now select from the Wartons what is of most interest to us in the study of poetic inspiration.

In 1740 Joseph Warton wrote The Enthusiast in which he sings the glories of wild nature over cultivation, and of fancy over reason; both romantic preferences, certainly. Reminding us of Thomson's idea of inspiration from nature, is the following passage from The Enthusiast.

----- ----- "The bards of old,
Fair Nature's friends, sought such retreats, to charm
Sweet Echo with their songs; oft too they met,
In summer evenings, near sequester's bowers,
Or mountain nymph, or Muse, and eager learnt
The moral strains she taught mankind."

No less interesting for its indebtedness to Milton is the following passage concerning the inspiration of Shakespeare:

"What are the lays of artful Addison
Coldly correct, to Shakespear's warblings wild?
Whom on the winding Avon's willow'd banks
Fair Fancy found, and bore the smiling babe
To a close cavern;¹ (still the shepherds show
The sacred place, whence with religious awe
They hear, returning from the field at eve,
Strange whisp'rings of sweet music through the air)
Here, as with honey gather'd from the rock,
She fed the little prattler, and with songs
Oft sooth'd his wand'ring ears, with deep delight
On her soft lap he sat, and caught the sounds."

1. "Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child
Warble his native woodnotes wild."

Joseph Warton's Odes appeared in 1746. Of greatest interest to us here is the Ode to Fancy, beginning with:

Oh Parent of each lovely Muse,
Thy spirit o'er my soul diffuse,
O'er all my artless songs preside,
My footsteps to thy temple guide,
To offer at thy turf-built shrine,
In golden cups no costly wine,
No murder'd fatling of the flock,
But flowers and honey from the rock.

This ode is an ardent song of praise for Fancy in her relation to Nature. Part of his invocation to Fancy is:

Then lay me by the haunted stream
Wrapt in some wild, poetic dream,
In converse while methinks I rove
With Spenser thro' a fairy grove;
Till suddenly awoke, I hear
Strange whisper'd music in my ear,
And my glad soul in bliss is drown'd
By the sweetly soothing sound!

After reading much more of similar nature, we may quote a passage which treats more specifically of inspiration:

At every season let my ear
Thy solemn whispers, Fancy, hear.
O warm, enthusiastic maid,
Without thy powerful, vital aid,
That breathes an energy divine,
That gives a soul to every line,
Ne'er may I strive with lips profane
To utter an unhallow'd strain,
Nor dare to touch the sacred string,
Save when with smiles thou bid'st me sing.

The rest of this poem is so suggestive of Warton's poetical theory and so expressive of an ardent feeling for

inspiration that we cannot forbear quoting it:

O, hear our prayer, O hither come
 From they lamented Shakespeare's tomb,
 On which thou lov'st to sit at eve,
 Musing o'er your darling's grave;
 O queen of numbers, once again
 Animate some chosen swain
 Who fill'd with unexhausted fire,
 May boldly smite the sounding lyre,
 Who with some new, unequalled song,
 May rise above the rhyming throng,
 O'er all our list'ning passions reign
 O'erwhelm our souls with joy and pain,
 With terror shake, with pity move,
 Rouze with revenge, or melt with love.
 O deign t' attend his evening walk,
 With him in groves and grottoes talk;
 Teach him to scorn with frigid art
 Feebly to touch th' enraptur'd heart;
 Like light'ning, let his mighty verse
 The bosom's inmost foldings pierce;
 With native beauties win applause,
 Beyond cold critic's studied laws;
 O let each Muse's fame increase,
 O bid Brittannia rival Greece !

We may consider these specimens as representative of Warton's poetry. Of his critical theory apart from his poetry it seems necessary to say that it is generally indicative of tendencies favoring belief in inspiration rather than specifically expressive of such a belief. For instance, in the critical papers which he wrote for the Adventurer, Warton constantly exalts nature, passion, and exuberance of imagination above all other qualities of poetry. The same tendency is shown in his most pretentious critical work, the Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope. The general character of that work is indicated

by Warton's fourfold classification of all poets on the basis that "the sublime and the pathetic are the two chief nerves of all genuine poesy." He says, in part:

"In the first class, I would place only three sublime and pathetic poets; Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. In the second class should be ranked such as possessed the true poetical genius, in a more moderate degree, but who had noble talents for moral ethical and panegyrical poesy. ----- In the third class may be placed men of wit, of elegant taste, and lively fancy in describing familiar life, though not the higher scenes of poetry. ----- In the fourth class, the mere versifiers, however smooth and mellifluous some of them may be thought, should be disposed."¹

Significant in this essay are the terms of praise Warton selects for whatever he considers true poetry. Some of these may be indicated. His favorite single word of praise is "Sublime."² He speaks of "creative and glowing imagination,"³ and of "boundless imagination."⁴ He desires in a writer "some strokes of enthusiasm," and says, indeed, "True poetry, after all, cannot well subsist, at least is never so striking, without a tincture of enthusiasm."⁵ He couples "originality and sublimity"⁶ in praise of Dante's Inferno and the Iliad. He remarks upon the union of genius and passion.⁷ He considers "one stroke of

1. Ibid, VII

2. Essay on Pope, Vol. I, pp. 10, 16, 17, 101, 164, 182, 243, 252, 265, 275, 320, 366, 389, etc.

3. Ibid, Dedication III

4. Ibid, p. 36.

5. Ibid, p. 317.

6. Ibid, p. 252.

7. Ibid, p. 102.

nature"¹ superior to pompous and dazzling thoughts. Uniting in praise, nature and passion, he says, "For wit and satire are transitory and perishing but Nature and Passion are eternal."² He likes the qualities of "beautiful abruptness" and of "artful suspense". He says. "Lyric poetry, especially, should not be minutely historical. When Juno had ended her speech in Horace with that spirited stanza ----- what follows surely weakens the conclusion of this ode and is comparatively flat ----- The inspiration under which the poet seems to have laboured, suddenly ceases, and he descends into a cold and prosaic apology."³

Thomas Warton's Observations on the Fairie Queen, though his greatest work, is not of so great interest to us just now as is his poetry. The greatest interest the Observations on the Fairie Queen has is that by that work Thomas Warton showed the value of the historical method of criticism, at a time when critical theory was sadly in need of such a method.

In reading his poetry we soon come upon such promising lines as these:

Ye high arch'd walls, where oft the whispers clear,
Of harps unseen have swept the poets' ear.⁴

The Elegy for Frederick Prince of Wales tells us

How to the few with sparks ethereal stor'd
He never barr'd his castle's genial gate,
But bade sweet Thomson share the friendly board
Soothing with verse divine the toil of state.

Warton speaks at length and eloquently of various phases of poetic inspiration in the following lines:

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1. Ibid, p. 257
 2. Ibid, p. 330
 3. Ibid, p. 375
 4. The Triumph of Isis

And O! blest queen, if e'er the magic powers
 Of warbled truth have won thy musing hours;
 Here Poesy, from awful days of yore
 Has pour'd her genuine gifts of raptur'd lore.
 Mid oaken bowers, with holy verdure wreath'd
 In Druid-songs her solemn spirit breathed!
 While cunning bards at ancient banquets sung
 Of paynim foes defied, and trophies hung
 Here Spenser tun'd his mystic minstrelsy
 And dress'd in fairy robes a queen like thee.
 Here, boldly mark'd with every living hue,
 Natures unbounded portrait Shakespeare drew:
 But chief, - the dreadful groupe of human woes
 The daring artist's tragic pencil chose;
 Lo! this the land, whence Milton's muse of fire,¹
 High soar'd to steal from heav'n a seraph's lyre;

Of especial interest to us in considering the idea of poetic inspiration as allied with romanticism are such expressions in the foregoing passage as "magic powers", "raptured lore" "mystic minstrelsy" and "Natures unbounded portrait."

In The Pleasures of Melancholy we find the following passage concerning the inspiration of Spenser and of Milton:

But let the sacred genius of the night
 Such mystic visions send, as Spenser saw,
 When thru' bewildering Fancy's magic maze,
 To the fell house of Busyrane, he led,
 The unshaken Britomart; or Milton knew,
 When in abstracted thought he first conceived
 All heav'n in tumult, and the seraphim
 Came tow'ring, armed in adamant and gold.

Characteristic of the romantic longing for solitude and the inspiration of unregulated fancy are the following lines from Ode IX:

Then scorn no more this unfrequented scene;
 -- -- -- --
 Nor call in vain inspiring ecstacy
 To bid her visions meet the frenzy rolling eye
 -- -- -- --
 Here hail the Muses: from the busy throng

1. On the Marriage of the King.

Remote, where Fancy dwells, and Nature prompts
the song.

A similar sentiment is expressed in Ode XI On the Ap-
proach of Summer:

Oh bear me to you antique wood,
Dim temple of sage solitude!
There within a nook most dark,
Where none my musing mood may mark,
Let me in many a whispered rite
The genius old of Greece invite. .

We may close our representation of Thomas Warton's poetry with his Sonnet to Gray. Since he speaks of his rustic muse it is to be supposed that "Nature prompts the song". Whatever his own inspiration in writing this sonnet it contains a glowing tribute to the inspiration of Gray.

Not that her blooms are mark'd with beauty's hue
My rustic Muse her votive chaplet brings;
Unseen, unheard, O Gray, to thee she sings!--
While slowly - pacing thru the church-yard dew,
At curfew time, beneath the dark green yew,
Thy pensive genius strikes the moral strings;
Or borne sublime on Inspiration's wings,
Hears Cambria's bards devote the dreadful clue
Of Edward's race with murders foul defil'd;
Can aught my pipe to reach thine ear essay?
No, bard divine! For many a care beguil'd
By the sweet magic of thy soothing lay,
For many a raptur'd thought, and vision wild,
To thee this strain of gratitude I pay

William Collins

The poems of William Collins, besides being generally indicative of the tendency toward romanticism, have abundant material for specific illustration of the new feeling for poetic inspiration. In the work of Collins, as in that of so many of the other writers we have to consider, the idea of poetic inspiration is linked to romanticism by the emphasis upon nature and fancy as

contrasted with art and learning.

Collins' romantic tendencies are shown by the Oriental Eclogues, which pretend to be translations. In the preface to those poems he speaks of the rich and figurative style of the Arabian or Persian and of the "elegancy and wildness of thought which recommends all their compositions." This admiration expressed for wildness of thought in its implication of lack of restraint or control is more significant perhaps than such specific references in the Eclogues as:

"Thus Selim sung, by sacred Truth inspir'd"¹

The Epistle to Sir Thomas Hanmer is chiefly interesting to us for its emphasis upon nature in preference to conscious perfection. We may quote part of a characteristic stanza:

With gradual steps and slow, exacter France
Saw Arts' fair empire o'er her shores advance;
By length of toil, a bright perfection knew,
Correctly bold, and just in all she drew.
Till late Corneille with Lucan's spirit fir'd
Breath'd the free strain, as Rome and he inspir'd.
-- -- -- -- --
But wilder far the British laurel spread
And wreaths less artful crown our poet's head.

Rather than quote at length from the work of Collins we may leave the praise of Shakespeare that follows in the Epistle and glance at that contained in the Ode to Fear:

Oh thou whose spirit most posscest
The sacred seat of Shakespear's breast,
By all that from thy prophet broke,
In thy divine emotions spoke
Hither again thy fury deal!
Teach me but once like him to feel.

In his Ode on the Poetical Character Collins thus speaks of Fancy:

1. Eclogue the First.

Young fancy thus to me divinest name,
 To whom, prepar'd and bath'd in heav'n,
 The test of amplest pow'r is given,
 To few the godlike gift assigns,
 To gird their blest prophetic loins,
 And gaze her visions wild and feel unmixed her flame.

This ode contains an interesting tribute to Milton:

I view that oak, the fancied glades among,
 By which as Milton lay, his ev'ning ear,
 From many a cloud that dropped ethereal dew,
 High spher'd in heav'n its native strains could
 hear,
 On which that ancient trump he reached was hung.
 -- -- -- --
 With many a vow from Hope's aspiring tongue,
 My trembling feet his guiding steps pursue;
 In vain - such bliss to one alone
 Of all the sons of soul was known,
 And Heav'n and Fancy, kindred pow'rs,
 Have now O'erturn'd th' inspiring bow'rs,
 Or curtain'd close such scene from ev'ry future
 view."

Of particular interest to us in correlating romanticism
 and the idea of poetic inspiration is the line:

"And Heaven and Fancy kindred pow'rs."

Thomas Gray

The correlation of the idea of divine inspiration of
 poetry with romanticism is particularly noticeable in the case of
 Gray. It is only in the poems written after he had become some-
 thing of a romanticist that we need look for anything of specific
 interest to us in a study of poetic inspiration.

Of Gray's progress toward romanticism William Lyon
 Phelps says: "Beginning as a classicist and disciple of Dryden,
 he ended in thorough-going Romanticism. His early poems contain
 nothing Romantic; his Elegy has something of the Romantic mood,

but shows many conventional touches; in the Pindaric Odes the Romantic feeling asserts itself boldly; and he ends in enthusiastic study of Norse and Celtic poetry and mythology."¹

Coincident with this progression is the appearance in Gray's poetry of the idea of divine inspiration. The early odes, On the Spring, On a Distant Prospect of Eton College, and To Adversity have nothing of it, unless a casual reference to the Muse might be taken to have meaning. In The Elegy we find a stanza indicative of some feeling for inspiration.

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to extasy the living lyre."

Connotative of inspiration, also, are the phrases in the stanza following the one quoted: "noble rage" and "genial current of the soul."

In The Progress of Poesy, the first of the Pindaric Odes, Gray's romantic feeling is manifest. In this ode too, he shows an ardent appreciation for the idea of poetic inspiration. He begins thus enthusiastically:

Awake Aeolian lyre, awake.
And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.
From Helicon's harmonious springs
A thousand rills their mazy progress take
The laughing flowers, that round them blow,
Drink life and fragrance as they flow.
Now the rich stream of music winds along
Deep, majestic, smooth, and strong,
Through verdant vales, and Cere's golden reign:
Now rowling down the steep amain,
Headlong, impetuous see it pour:
The rocks, and nodding groves rebellow to the roar.

1. Phelps' edition of Gray's works Athenaeum Press series p. xxii.

This apostrophe to poetry with its emphasis upon majesty and richness, rapture and impetuosity is certainly indicative of the new attitude.

Gray thus recounts the "Progress of Poetry from Greece to Italy, and from Italy to England."¹

Woods, that wane o'er Delphe's steep,
Isles, that crown th' Aegean deep,
Fields, that cool Ilissus laves,
Or where Maeander's amber waves
In lingering Lab'rinx creep
How do your tuneful Echo's languish,
Mute, but to the voice of Anguish?
Where each old poetic Mountain
Inspiration breath'd around;
Ev'ry shade and hallow'd Fountain
Murmur'd deep a solemn sound:
Till the sad Nine in Greece's evil hour
Left their Parnassus for the Latian plains
Alike they scorn the pomp of Tyrant-power,
And coward Vice, that revels in her chains.
When Latium had her lofty spirit lost,
They sought, oh Albion! next thy sea encircled
coast.

Gray describes the inspiration of Shakespeare:

Far from the sun and summer-gale
In thy green lays was Nature's Darling laid
What time where lucid Avon stray'd
To Him the mighty Mother did unveil
Her awful face. The dauntless child
Stretch'd forth his little arms, and smiled
This pencil take (she said) whose colours clear
Richly paint the vernal year:
Thine too these golden keys, immortal Boy!
This can unlock the gates of Joy;
Of Horror that, and thrilling Fears
Or ape the sacred source of sympathetic Tears.

And of Milton:

Nor second He, that rode sublime
Upon the seraph-wings of Extasy
The secrets of th' Abyss to spy.
He passed the flaming bounds of Place and Time:
The living-Throne, the sapphire-blaze,
Where Angels tremble, while they gaze,
He saw; but blasted with excess of light,
Closed his eyes in endless night.

1. Gray's own note to II 3.

And of Dryden:

Hark, his hands the lyre explore!
Bright-eyed Fancy hovering o'er
Scatters from her pictured urn
Thoughts, that breath, and words, that burn.

Of interest, too, is Gray's reference, in closing this ode, to his own inspiration:

Oh! Lyre divine, what daring Spirit
Wakes thee now? tho' he inherit
Nor the pride, nor ample pinion,
That the Theban Eagle bear
Smiling with supreme dominion
Thru' the azure deep of air:
Yet oft before his infant eyes would run
Such forms as glitter in the Muse's ray
With orient hues, unborrow'd of the Sun:
Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,
Beneath the good how far - out far above the great.

Corresponding to the previously quoted tribute to Shakespeare in its emphasis upon the inspiring power of nature is the following stanza from the Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude:

Rise, my soul! on wings of fire,
Rise the rapturous choir among;
Hark! 'tis Nature strikes the lyre,
And leads the general song.

The Bard is the other Pindaric ode of interest to us in treating of Gray's exalted idea of poetry. The original plan of this ode as Gray stated it is quoted by Phelps in his notes:

"The Army of Edward I as they march through a deep valley are suddenly stopped by the appearance of a venerable figure seated on the summit of an inaccessible rock, who, with a voice more than human, reproaches the King with all the misery and desolation which he had brought on his country; foretells the misfortunes of the Norman race, and with prophetic spirit declares that

all his cruelty shall never extinguish the noble ardour of poetic genius in this island; and that men shall never be wanting to celebrate true virtue and valour in immortal strains, to expose vice and infamous pleasure, and boldly censure tyranny and oppression. His song ended, he precipitates himself from the mountain, and is swallowed up by the river that rolls at its foot."

Gray does not adhere to this plan in every particular and adds the circumstance of all the slain bards joining with the Poet "in dreadful harmony" to weave the line of Edward. The ode is like the plan, however, in spirit, and exalts the Bard in nature and in triumph. We may quote the description of the Bard:

On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
Robed in the sable garb of woe
With haggard eyes the Poet stood;
(Loose his beard, and hoary hair
Streamed like a meteor, to the troubled air,
And with a Master's hand, and Prophet's fire
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.

The supernatural character of the poets slain by Edward is emphasized in the following words of the Bard:

'Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,
'Dear as the light that visits these sad
eyes,
'Dear, as the ruddy drops that warm my heart,
'Ye died amidst your dying country's cries -
'No more I weep. They do not sleep.
'On yonder cliffs, a griesly band,
'I see them sit, they linger yet,
'Avengers of their native land:
'With me in dreadful harmony they join,
'And weave with bloody hands the tissue of
thy line.'

Then follows at length the solemn pronouncement upon Edward by all the supernatural poets. We may quote their concluding words and the words of the first Bard alone, as he sees

them depart.

"Edward, lo! to sudden fate
 "(Weave we the woof. The thread is spun)
 "Half of thy heart we consecrate.
 "(The web is wove. The word is done."
 'Stay oh stay! nor thus forlorn
 'Leave me unblessed, unpitied, here to mourn
 'In yon bright track, that fires the western
 skies,
 'They melt, they vanish from my eyes.
 'But oh! what solemn scenes on Snowdon's height
 'Descending slow their glitt'ring skirts unroll.
 'Visions of glory, spare my aching sight,
 'The unborn ages, crowd not on my soul!
 'No more our long-lost Arthur we bewail.
 'All hail, ye genuine Kings. Britannias Issue,
 hail!

The poem closes with the bard's vision of the coming
 poets:

'They breathe a soul to animate thy clay
 'Bright rapture calls, and soaring, as
 she sings,
 'Waves in the eye of Heav'n her many col-
 our'd wings.

-- -- -- -- --
 'A Voice as of the Cherub-choir,
 'Gales from blooming Eden bear;
 'And distant warblings lessen on my ear,
 'That lost in long futurity expire.

In a study of Gray we may draw interesting material,
 also from the Ode for Music - "Performed at the installation of
 the Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, 1769". Perhaps
 the most suggestive is the following stanza from that ode:

From yonder realms of empyrean day
 Bursts on my ear th' indignant lay:
 There sit the sainted Sage, the Bard divine,
 The Few, whom genius gave to shine
 Through every unborn age, and undiscovered clime
 Rapt in celestial transport they,
 Yet hither oft a glance from high
 They send of tender sympathy
 To bless the place, where on their opening soul
 First the genuine ardor stole.

Such passages as these give us an impression of Gray's

worshipful attitude toward poetry and of his feeling for it as something divine and not entirely comprehensible to mortals. Most characteristic, perhaps, of the feeling for inspiration as it is associated with romantic mystery is the expression

To him the mighty mother did unveil
Her awful face.

Edward Young

Edward Young, author of the romantic Night Thoughts, made a very important contribution to the furtherance of the idea of poetic inspiration when he wrote his Conjectures of Original Composition. This work, printed in 1759, is of greatest interest in its ardent exaltation of original genius above learning or art. It carries on in a more positive and specific way the main idea that Addison had introduced into the critical theory of the eighteenth century, the idea of the superiority of original genius to any imitative abilities. Very early in his treatise Young thus expresses his admiration for genius:

"But there are who write with vigour and success, to the world's delight and their own renown. These are the glorious fruits where genius prevails. The mind of a man of genius is a fertile and pleasant field; pleasant as Elysium, and fertile as Tempe, it enjoys a perpetual spring. Of that spring originals are the fairest flowers; imitations are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom."¹

1. Works 1854 Vol. II p. 551.

Later he says: "An original may be said to be of a vegetable nature, it rises spontaneously from the Vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made; imitations are often a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art and labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own."¹

He expresses respect and admiration for the "admirable compositions" of the ancient authors-"sacred be their rights, and inviolable their fame," he says - but warns against servile imitation of them:

"Let our understanding feed on theirs; they afford the noblest nourishment; but let them nourish not annihilate, our own. When we read, let our imagination kindle at their charms; when we write, let our judgment shut them out of our thoughts; treat even Homer himself as his royal admirer was treated by the lyric,- bid him stand aside, nor shall our composition from the beams of our own genius; for nothing original can rise, nothing immortal can ripen, in any other sun."²

The discussion following this is very eloquent in its faith in unrestricted nature. After insisting that the ancients held no essential superiority and are not to be allowed to enslave us he thus declares himself:

"Genius is a master workman, learning is but an instrument; and an instrument, though most valuable, yet not always indispensable. Heaven will not admit of a partner in the accomplishment of some favorite spirits; but rejecting all human means, assumes the whole glory to itself. Have not some, though not famed for erudition, so written, as almost to persuade us that they shone

1. Ibid. p. 552.

2. Ibid. p. 554.

brighter and soared higher for escaping the boasted aid of that proud ally?

"Nor is it strange; for what, for the most part mean we by genius, but the power of accomplishing great things without the means generally reputed necessary to that end? A genius differs from a good understanding, as a magician from a good architect; this raises his structure by means invisible, this by the skilful use of common tools. Hence genius has ever been supposed to partake of something Divine."¹

Soon we have the positive statement of the belief toward which the argument has been tending - the belief in divine inspiration of genius. That statement is reached in the following manner:

"By the praise of genius we detract not from learning; we detract not from the value of gold by saying that a diamond has greater still.----- Learning we thank, genius we revere; that gives us pleasure, this gives us rapture; that informs, this inspires, and is itself inspired, for genius is from heaven, learning from man. -----"²

This belief is later pleasingly elaborated. After recounting the faults of imitation he says:

"But, notwithstanding these disadvantages of imitation, imitation must be the lot --- of most writers. If there is a famine of invention in the land, like Joseph's brethren we must travel far for food, we must visit the remote and rich ancients. But an inventive genius may safely stay at home; that, like the

1. Ibid. p. 556.

2. Ibid. p. 559

widow's cruse, is divinely replenished from within, and affords us a miraculous delight. Whether our own genius be such or not, we diligently should inquire, that we may not go a begging with gold in our purse; for there is a mine in man, which must be deeply dug ere we can conjecture its contents."¹

From this last observation, Young progresses to the statement: "Virgil and Horace owed their divine talents to Heaven, their immortal words to men: thank Marcenus and Augustus for them." He then proceeds to "borrow two golden rules from ethics, which are no less golden in composition than in life: 1. 'Know thyself;' 2. 'Reverence thyself'."² After elaboration of these ideas he makes use of them as follows:

"This is the difference between those two luminaries in literature, the well accomplished scholar, and the divinely inspired enthusiast: the first is, as the bright morning star; the second, as the rising sun. The writer who neglects those two rules above, will never stand alone: he makes one of a group, and thinks in wretched unanimity with the throng -----"³

As further warning against imitation he says:

"True poesy, like true religion, abhors adolatriy, and though it honours the memory of the exemplary, and takes them willingly (yet cautiously) as guides in the way of glory, real (though unexampled) excellence is its only aim; nor looks it for any inspiration less than divine."⁴

1. Ibid. p. 562.

2. Ibid. p. 564.

3. Ibid. p. 565.

4. Ibid. p. 569.

In commanding emulation of the ancients rather than imitation, Young maintains that hope to excel them is no resurrection. He calls attention to the advances men have made in all fields of composition and then says:

"And for man not to grasp at all which is laudable within his reach, is a dishonour to human nature, and a disobedience to the divine; for as Heaven does nothing in vain, its gift of talents implies an injunction of their use."¹

We have reached in this work of Young's a fairly complete resolution of the tendencies we have previously noted. The idea of poetic inspiration is presented to us closely joined to the exaltation of unrestrained nature and original genius.

Richard Hurd

The work of Bishop Hurd most generally cited as valuable to a study of Romanticism is that called Letters of Chivalry and Romance, published in 1762. Of first interest, however, are Hurd's critical comments on the Epistles of Horace, which he edited in 1749. By means of these comments the ancient doctrine of inspiration is brought clearly before the view of eighteenth century criticism. Hurd does not commit himself in regard to the belief, but it is interesting to note at what length he comments upon it whenever it is merely suggested by Horace.

1. Ibid. p. 572.

Hurd's comment on l 295 to l 325 of Horace's Ars Poetica is in part:

"The poet ridicules that false notion, into which the Romans had fallen, that poetry and possession were nearly the same thing; that nothing more was required in a poet, than some extravagant starts and sallies of thought; that coolness and reflexion were inconsistent with his character, and that poetry was not to be scanned by the rules of sober sense. This they carried so far as to affect the outward port and air of madness and, upon the strength of that appearance, to set up for wits and poets. -----"¹

Later Hurd adds a further comment in this same passage in which he quotes Cicero and Petronius and then says:

"And to the same purpose every good critic, ancient or modern. But who can endure the grimace of those minute genii, who, because the truly inspired, in the ravings of the fit, are touched with the flame and fury of enthusiasm, must, therefore, with a tame, frigid fancy be laying claim to the same fervent and fiery raptures? -----"²

This distinction between true inspiration and frigid imitation Hurd must have felt to be particularly necessary in consideration of the early eighteenth century poetry.

The question of art and nature is always a vital one to the idea of poetic inspiration. Of Horace's conclusion "that art and nature must conspire to the production of a perfect piece" Hurd speaks at length. Finally he proceeds to "observe what perpetual matter of debate this question hath furnished to the ancient learned." He begins the observation with:

1. Hurd works 1811. Vol. I, p. 50, 51, 52.

2. Hurd works 1811. Vol. I, p. 249, 250.

"It seems first to have taken its rise from the high pretension of poets to inspiration, ----- which was afterwards understood in too literal a sense, and in time extended to all works of genius or imitation."¹

Hurd's discussion, following this, of the relation in critical theory of art and nature and judgment and inspiration, is interesting enough in our present study to be quoted at some length. He speaks of the tendency of mankind to exalt "former examples of a different cast and merit," and then says:

"Thus, in the case before us, exquisite art and commanding genius, being the two only means of rising to superior literary excellence, in proportion as any age became noted for the one it was constantly deformed, and the preference given to the other. So, during the growth of letters in any state, when a sublimity of sentiment and strength of expression make, as under those circumstances they always will, the characteristic of the times, the critic, disgusted with the rude workings of nature, affects to admire only the nicer finishings and proportions of art. When, let but the growing experience of a few years refine and perfect the public taste, and what was before traduced as roughness and barbarity, becomes at once nerves, dignity, and force. Then art is effeminacy; and judgment want of spirit. All now is rapture and inspiration."²

After giving examples of alternation of regard for spirit and judgment, with their corresponding qualities, he closes this work with a tribute to the genius of Shakespeare.

1. Hurd Works 1811 Vol. I, p. 274.

2. Hurd Works, Vol. I, p. 275,6.

"There was a time, when the art of Jonson was set above the divinest raptures of shakespeare. The present age is well convinced of the mistake. And now the genius of shakespeare is idolized in its turn. Happily for the public taste, it can scarcely be too much so."

Hurd's notes on Horace's Epistle to Augustus have many points of interest to us. We may instance the note on l. 118:

"What follows from hence to v. 136, containing an encomium on the office of poets, is one of the leading beauties in the epistle. Its artifice consists in this, that, under the cover of a negligent commendation interspersed with even some traits of pleasantry upon them, it insinuates to the emperor, in the manner the least offensive and ostentatious, the genuine merits and even sacredness of their character."¹

In his note on l. 132 of concerning the Poet's Services to Religion, Hurd presents the doctrine that Dennis so ardently espoused, the doctrine that religion is capable of raising poetry to the highest enthusiasm it may reach. He says:

"All the customary addresses of Heathenism to its gods, more especially on any great and solemn emergency, were the words of the poet. For nature, it seems, had taught the pagan world, what the Hebrew Prophets themselves did not disdain to practise, that, to lift the imagination, and, with it, the sluggish affections of human nature, to Heaven, it was expedient to lay hold on every assistance of art. They therefore presented their supplications to the Divinity in the richest and brightest dress of eloquence, which is poetry. Not to insist, that devotion, when

1. Hurd's Works 1811 Vol. I, p. 378.

sincere and ardent, from its very nature, enkindles a glow of thought, which communicates strongly with the transports of poetry. Hence the language of the Gods (for so was poetry accounted, as well as from its being the divinest species of communication, our rude conceptions can well frame even for superior intelligencies, as for that it was the fittest vehicle of our applications to them) became not the ornament only, but an essential in the ceremonial of paganism."¹

To the commentary and notes on Horace Hurd added critical dissertations. The first of these On the Idea of Universal Poetry contains a passage related somewhat to our last quotation and of further interest:

"For there is something in the mind of man sublime and elevated, which prompts it to overlook all obvious and familiar appearances and to feign to itself other and more extraordinary; such as correspond to the extent of its own powers, and fill out all the faculties and capacities of our souls. This restless and aspiring disposition, poetry, first and principally, would indulge and flatter; and thence takes its name of divine, as if some power, above human, conspired to lift the mind to these exalted conceptions."²

The passage immediately following continues even more romantically:

"Hence it comes to pass, that it deals in apostrophies and invocations; that it impersonates the virtues and vices; peoples all creation with new and living forms; calls up infernal

1. Hurd Works 1811, Vol. I, p. 383.

2. Vol. II, p. 8, 9.

spectres to terrify, or brings down celestial natures to astonish, the imagination; assembles, combines or connects its ideas, at pleasure; in short, prefers not only the agreeable, and the graceful, but, as occasion calls upon her, the vast, the incredible, I had almost said, the impossible, to the obvious truth and nature of things. For all this is but a feeble expression of that magic virtue of poetry, which our Shakespear has so forcibly described in those well-known lines:

The poets eye, in a rine frenzy rowling,
Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth
to heav'n;
And as Imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to aery nothing.
A local habitation and a name.

"When the received system of manners or religion in any country, happens to be so constituted as to suit itself in some degree to this extravagant turn of the human mind, we may expect that poetry will seize it with avidity, will dilate upon it with pleasure, and take pride to erect its specious wonders on so proper and convenient a ground. Whence it cannot seem strange that, of all the forms in which poetry has appeared, that of pagan fable, and gothic romance, should in their turns, be found the most alluring to the true poet."

A similarly interesting discussion of the raptures of imagination is that found in A Discourse on Poetical Imitation. From it we may quote:

"We are so constituted, as to have a quick perception of beauty in the forms, combinations, and aspects of things about us; ----- we may observe, that it operates universally on all men; more especially the young and unexperienced; who are not less

transported by the novelty, than beauty of material objects. But its impressions are strongest on those, whom nature hath touched with a ray of that celestial fire, which we call true genius. Here the workings of this instructive sense are so powerful, that, to judge from its effects, one should conclude, it perfectly entranced, and bore away the mind, as in a fit of rapture."¹

In this discourse he treats of the various subjects and passions of poetry and touches again upon the relation of religion and poetry. He says as a summary of that subject: "So that the intermixture of religion, in every point of view, is not only agreeable, but necessary to the very genius of, at least, the highest class of poetry."²

Further on in this discourse he speaks of the ancient regard for poetry as sacred:

"For the first originals in the several species of poetry, like the Autocthones of old, were deemed to have come into the world by a kind of miracle. They were perfect prodigies, at least reputed so by the admiring multitude, from their first appearance. So that their authority, in a short time, became sacred; and succeeding writers were obliged, at the hazard of their fame, and as they dreaded the charge of a presumptuous and profane libertinism in poetry, to take them for their guides and models. Which is said even without the licence of a figure; at least of one of them; whom Cicero calls the fountain and origin of all Divine institutions; -----"³

1. Hurd Works 1811, Vol. II, p. 117.

2. Ibid. p. 167.

3. Ibid. p. 221.

The Letters on Chivalry and Romance, written in 1762 were based on the subject-matter of the dialogues on the Age of Queen Elizabeth which had appeared in 1759 among the Dialogues Moral and Political.

The great romantic significance of these letters is due to the fact that they exalt the material of Gothic Romance as pre-eminent in imaginative appeal to other subjects of poetry.

Hurd's point of view is interesting to us in a study of poetic inspiration in that he considers the genius of all poets to have been aroused by similar stimuli to the imagination.

Of the influence of Gothic Romance Hurd speaks as follows:

"The spirit of Chivalry was a fire which soon spent itself, but that of Romance, which was kindled at it, burnt long, and continued its light and heat even to the politer ages.

"The greatest geniuses of our own and foreign countries, such as Ariosto and Tasso in Italy, and Spenser and Milton in England, were seduced by these barbarities of their forefathers; were even charmed by the Gothic Romances. Was this caprice and absurdity in them? Or, may there not be something in the Gothic Romance peculiarly suited to the views of a genius, and to the ends of poetry? -----"¹

After a long account of Chivalry and Romance with a comparison of gothic and ancient times and the similar elements made use of in their literature, he considers the superiority of the gothic magic well proved. As a conclusion of Letter VI he writes:

1. Hurd Works 1811, Vol. IV, p. 239.

"We are upon enchanted ground, my friend; and you are to think yourself well used, that I detain you no longer in this fearful circle. The glympse you have had of it will help your imagination to conceive the rest. And without more words you will readily apprehend that the fancies of our modern bards are not only more gallant, but on a change of the scene, more sublime, more terrible, more alarming, than those of the classic fablers. In a word, you will find that the manners they paint, and the superstitions they adopt, are the more poetical for being gothic."¹

Of Spenser and Milton he says in Letter VII:

"It is not to be doubted but that each of these bards had kindled his poetic fire from classic fables. So that, of course, their prejudices would be that way. Yet they both appear, when most inflamed, to have been more particularly rapt with the gothic fables of Chivalry."

"This passage, expressed, as we see, all in the language of the theories of inspiration, is succeeded by a more specific discussion of Spenser and Milton. Then, in conclusion of the letter, he has this to say of the inspiration of Shakespeare by Gothic elements:

"I shall add nothing to what I before observed of Shakespeare, because the sublimity (the divinity, let it be, if nothing else will serve) of his genius kept no certain rout, but rambled at hazard into all the regions of human life and manners.----- Yet one thing is clear, that even he is greater when he uses Gothic manners and machinery, than when he employs classical, which brings us again to the same point, that the former have,

by their nature and genius the advantage of the latter in producing the sublime."

We might quote many more passages of similar purport to show Hurd's ardent conviction that the Gothic wonder and enchantment must be of greatest value in inspiring poetic fervor. To overcome criticism of this inspiring extravagance he brings forward the idea of poetical truth "which the poet's eye rolling in a fine frenzy can but just lay hold of,"¹ and insists that "the poet has a world of his own, where experience has less to do, than consistent imagination." Of the "fanciful exhibitions of the tales of Fairy he says:

"You may call them as one does, 'extraordinary dreams, such as excellent poets and painters, by being over studious may have in the beginning of fevers.'

"The epic poet would acknowledge the charge, and even value himself upon it. He would say, 'I leave to the sage dramatist the merit of being always broad awake, and always in his senses. The divine dream and delirious fancy, are among the noblest of my prerogatives. ' "²

In finishing his account of the decline and degradation of "Tales of Fairy," Hurd ends the last letter of Chivalry and Romance in this manner:

"What we have gotten by this revolution, you will say, is a great deal of good sense. What we have lost, is a world of fine fabling; the illusion of which is so grateful to the Charmed Spirit that in spite of philosophy and fashion, Fairy spenser

1. Hurd Works 1811, Vol. IV p. 324.

2. Ibid. p. 328.

still ranks highest among the poets. I mean, with all those who are either come of that house, or have any kindness for it.

"Earth born critics, my friend, may blaspheme.
'But all the Gods are ravish'd with delight
'Of his celestial song, and music's wondrous might'"

Hugh Blair

An interesting view of the abandon to primitive emotion which was the ideal of romanticism is given by Hugh Blair in his Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian. He says:

"Irregular and unpolished we may expect the productions of uncultivated ages to be; but abounding, at the same time, with that enthusiasm, that vehemence and fire, which are the soul of poetry: for many circumstances of those times which we call barbarous, are favorable to the poetical spirit. That state, in which human nature shoots wild and free, though unfit for other improvements, certainly encourages the high exertions of fancy and passion."¹

Blair speaks of poetry as "the child of imagination" and says it is likely to be more glowing and animated in the first ages of society just as the imaginative powers are more vigorous in youth.¹

Of the works of Ossian he says: "There we find the fire and enthusiasm of the most early times, combined with an amazing degree of regularlity and art."² After discussing Celtic poetry and bards he says: "I shall next consider the particular advantages which Ossian possessed. He appears to have lived in a period which enjoyed all the benefit I just now

1. The Poems of Ossian, 1807, Vol. I, p. 76.

2. Ibid, p. 95.

mentioned of traditional poetry-----. Ossian, himself, appears to have been endowed by nature with an exquisite sensibility of heart; prone to that tender melancholy which is so often an attendant on great genius; and susceptible equally of strong and soft emotions."¹

Speaking with more and more of romantic fervor as he proceeds in his discussion of Ossian, Blair comes, as it is inevitable that he should, to an ardent statement of Ossian's inspiration.

We may quote some remarks on Ossian that show Blair's romantic tendencies:

"Assuming it then, as well we may, for certain, that the poems now under consideration, are genuine venerable monuments of very remote antiquity; I proceed to make some remarks upon their general spirit and strain. The two great characteristics of Ossian's poetry are tenderness and sublimity ----- an air of solemnity and seriousness is diffused over the whole. ----- The events recorded, are all serious and grave; the scenery throughout, wild and romantic ----- all produce a solemn attention in the mind, and prepare it for great and extraordinary events. ----- His poetry, more perhaps than that of any other writer, deserves to be styled, The Poetry of the Heart. It is a heart penetrated with noble sentiments and with sublime and tender passions; a heart that glows, and kindles the fancy; a heart that is full, and pours itself forth."

Immediately following this comes the climax of Blair's enthusiasm for Ossian in which he says:

1. Poems of Ossian, 1807 edition. Vol. I, p. 103.

"Ossian did not write, like modern poets, to please readers and critics. He sung from the love of poetry and song. His delight was to think of the heroes among whom he had flourished; to recall the affecting incidents of his life, to dwell upon his past wars, and loves, and friendships; till, as he expresses it himself, 'there comes a voice to Ossian and awakes this soul. It is the voice of years that are gone; they roll before me with all their deeds;' and under this true poetic inspiration, giving vent to his genius, no wonder we should so often hear, and acknowledge in his strains, the powerful and ever-pleasing voice of nature."¹

So great is Blair's veneration for Ossian that he compares him at length with Homer. To give only a fragment of that elaborate comparison we may select the following:

"Both poems are eminently sublime; but a difference may be remarked in the species of their sublimity. Homer's sublimity is accompanied with more impetuosity and fire; Ossian's with more of a solemn and awful grandeur."²

For all that he has said, in enthusiasm, of Ossian, Blair feels that the absence of religious ideas as inspiration has been a handicap to him. In his views on this point Blair goes back to the very position of John Dennis who had affirmed at the beginning of the century that the fittest ideas to arouse enthusiastical passion in poetry were religious ideas. Blair thus expresses his feeling:

"Notwithstanding the poetical advantages which I have ascribed to Ossian's machinery, I acknowledge it would have been

1. Poems of Ossian, Vol. I, p. 115.

2. Ibid. p. 118.

much more beautiful and perfect, had the author discovered some knowledge of a Supreme being.----- For the most august and lofty ideas that can embellish poetry are derived from the belief of a divine administration of the universe; and hence the invocation of a Supreme Being, or at least of some superior powers who are conceived as presiding over human affairs, the solemnities of religious worship, prayers preferred, and assistance implored on critical occasions, appear with great dignity in the works of almost all poets as chief ornaments of their compositions. The absence of all such religious ideas from Ossian's poetry, is a sensible blank in it; the more to be regretted, as we can easily imagine what an illustrious figure they would have made under the management of such a genius as his; and how finely they would have been adapted to many situations which occur in his works."¹

After having relieved himself on this point Blair returns to examine with great admiration the separate works of Ossian, and to discuss at length his manner of writing as "a poet of original genius." In conclusion Blair suggests what he considers the essential qualities of Ossian's poetry. In this estimate he seems to consider Ossian's inspiration to have been sufficient, and judges him from a truly romantic point of view. He says:

"Upon the whole, if to feel strongly, and to describe naturally, be the two chief ingredients of poetical genius, Ossian must, after a fair examination, be held to possess that genius in a high degree. The question is not, whether a few

1. The Poems of Ossian, Vol. I, p. 149.

improprieties may be pointed out in his works;-----But, has he the spirit, the fire, the inspiration, of a poet? Does he utter the voice of nature? Does he elevate by his sentiments? Does he interest by his descriptions? Does he point to the heart as well as to the fancy? Does he make his readers glow, and tremble, and weep? These are the great characteristics of true poetry.-----Uncouth and abrupt Ossian may sometimes appear by reason of his conciseness. But he is sublime, he is pathetic in an eminent degree."¹

Of the "translation" of Ossian Blair has this to say:

"To transfuse such spirit and fervid ideas from one language to another; to translate it literally, and yet with such a glow of poetry; to keep alive so much passion, and support so much dignity throughout, is one of the most difficult works of genius, and proves the translator to have been animated with no small portion of Ossian's spirit."

Blair's conclusion in regard to Ossian is reminiscent of Longinus' test for poetry in his treatise on The Sublime. He says:

"If then, exhibited in a literal version, Ossian still has power to please as a poet; and not to please only, but often to command, to transport, to melt the heart; we may very safely infer, that his productions are the offspring of true and uncommon genius; and we may boldly assign him a place among those whose works are to last for ages."

1. The Poems of Ossian, Vol. I, p. 219, 220.

Conclusion

With a study of these eighteenth century authors, fragmentary and incomplete though the list is, we are able to see the tendencies which unite the idea of poetic inspiration with the new romantic spirit. In the various manifestations of new enthusiasm we trace the idea of poetic inspiration. We have seen how John Dennis emphasized the thought that for true poetry the mind of the poet must be raised above its natural state into an ardor and exaltation of enthusiasm. In declaring that "Passion is the characteristical mark of poetry", he indicated the idea that was to be developed so significantly a little while later.

In the increasing interest and admiration for enthusiasm as a source of superordinary power we have the beginning of the romantic belief in poetic inspiration. It seems probable that Shaftesbury furthered this belief by his great interest in the subject of enthusiasm.

Though we have made no specific examination in this paper of the consistent rise of enthusiasm and its domination of eighteenth century thought we should here summarize at least the general movements in its favor.

The enthusiasm that favored the belief in poetic inspiration first rose in religious fervor. To the great disgust of the carefully balanced classical school William Law introduced an agitating element of religious enthusiasm. Different in belief but similar in enthusiastic effect was the Methodist movement under the leadership of John Wesley. The enthusiasm

cultivated by the Methodists had all the signs of superhuman possession. Men gave expression in a wild unregulated manner to impulses which stirred them under the influence of evangelical preaching.

In a different direction than the orthodox religions did the Deists rouse enthusiasm. Their type of enthusiasm was held in disfavor at the beginning of the eighteenth century because of its tendency to upset established conventionalities and its refusal to be satisfied with a settled common sense religion. The strength of the Deists grew, however, and even more important than the increasing number of their avowed members was the constantly increasing power of Deism as a leavening agent. Long before Rousseau's fervent avowal of Deistic principles they had been working in English thought. John Byrom has given a good impression of the Deistic enlivening power, in his poem Enthusiasm. In this poem he combats prejudice against the quality of enthusiasm and goes far to raise admiration for its better manifestations. He speaks of "the God within" and calls enthusiasm "thought enkindled to a high degree". The significant Deistic conceptions of God manifested in man and nature we have noted in our study of James Thomson.

The idea of divinity in man is connected closely with the emphasis upon individual genius. In place of the neo-classical idea of modeling with external materials in conformance to established rules, the new spirit favored production in obedience to an inner prompting. The poet's work, according to the new spirit, should be irrespective of everything except

the genius within. We have remarked upon the appearance of this new spirit in the writings of Addison. It crops out frequently in the eighteenth century writings indicative of the rising tendency toward romanticism, and is embodied in the conflicts between nature and art, genius and learning, fancy and judgment, which show a constantly greater tendency toward the victory of individual genius. The most comprehensive treatment of the subject of original genius we have noted particularly in the work of Edward Young. He shows us better than any of the writers of his time the union of the ideas of original genius and of poetic inspiration. Worthy of note here is Burns' poetic expression, somewhat later, of the idea emphasized by Young, the idea of Nature's superiority over the efforts of learning. Burns says:

Give me ae spark o' Nature's fire,
Thats a' the learning I desire;
Then tho' I drudge thro' dub and mire
At pleugh or cart,
My Muse, though hamely in attire,
May touch the heart.

Belonging in the same category with the genius and art controversy is the romantic exaltation of "fancy." There was a constantly growing tendency, connected with romanticism, to respect the powers of fancy unregulated by art or judgment. For this point we have examined the poems of Thomson, Collins, and Joseph Warton. Gray also touches upon it, though not so elaborately. In consideration of the authority and dominion given to fancy as an unspringing spontaneous power it seems by no means amiss to cite it as having to do with the idea of poetic inspiration.

Related to the idea of the power of the fancy to conjure up wonders not attainable by sober reason is the general romantic love for the wonderful and the strange. One common way of satisfying this craving was the antiquarian revival of old romantic lore. We see the connection of this with the idea of poetic inspiration in the work of Thomas Warton. In his imitations of Spenser we find many references to "mystic visions" and similar properties of inspiration. Gray shows us an attitude of poetry that has in it much of worship and awe. The wonderful and the supernatural aspect of poetry is emphasized both in The Bard and in The Progress of Poetry. Further illustrative of the romantic love of the strange and the marvellous is the attitude of Richard Hurd toward the Gothic Romances. The tendency of which we have here been speaking is certainly favorable to a theory ascribing the source of poetry to an unexplainable and super-human power.

The culmination of the eighteenth century tendencies toward belief in poetic inspiration is found in the personality and poetry of William Blake. Though we have not opportunity in this study to undertake an adequate treatment of Blake it is interesting to think of him as the result of the romantic reaction against the new-classical school. Blake, it seems, believed implicitly in divine inspiration. We find many interesting accounts of the effect this belief had upon him.¹

A study of so complete a believer in inspiration as Blake was, brings us to a consideration of the effect upon

1. See particularly P. Berger William Blake, Poet and Mystic and G. K. Chesterton Blake.

literature of the belief in poetic inspiration if carried to its last resolution. Because Blake thought all his poems were divinely sent, he simply spoke whatever came to him. His poems are totally unregulated by judgment or by effort. Spontaneity they have but no standards of excellence. Good and bad stand together as a record of the poet's consciousness. Quite different from this "passive medium" attitude of Blake's is an idea of poetic inspiration such as that held by Milton. Milton, as we know, regarded himself as an active instrument of the Divine Spirit. He early resolved to use his gifts.

"As ever in my great Task-master's eye." Milton's attitude was one of consecration. He believed in inspiration, but he insisted that the human instrument of Divine expression should be perfected by human endeavor. He believed that only by the utmost effort and by the most high standards could the poet become sensible to Divine inspiration. We can well see that the effect upon literature of such an ideal of inspiration as this would be far different than the effect of the characteristically romantic abandon. We may say in conclusion that the greatest value of the romantic view of inspiration was its effectiveness in counteracting the tenets of the neo-classical school. As an established belief it would itself be as detrimental to literature as that other extreme to which it was opposed.

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